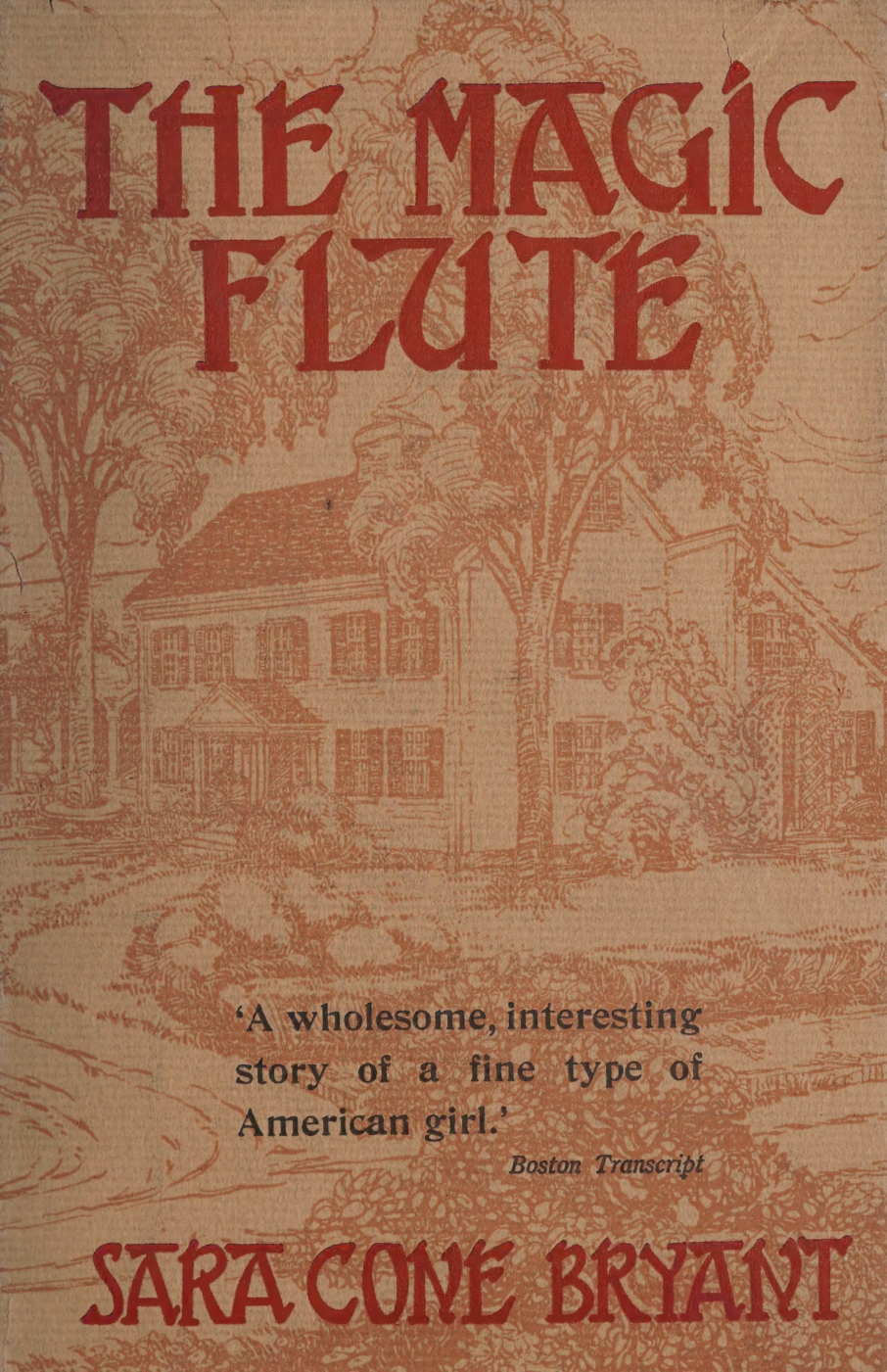


THE MAGIC FLUTE



'A wholesome, interesting
story of a fine type of
American girl.'

Boston Transcript

SARA CONE BRYANT

THE MAGIC FLUTE

By
Sara Cone Bryant

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THE MAGIC FLUTE



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THE MAGIC FLUTE

THE MAGIC FLUTE

BY
SARA CONE BRYANT

(Mrs. Theodore F. Borst)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ALICE HUNT WINCHESTER



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THE MAGIC FLUTE



CHAPTER I

WASHED and brushed free of the oily smell of machines, Dan Merriam quick-stepped across the back yard and vaulted the boundary fence with the lightness of his twenty-two years. On the other side of the fence, he lifted the eleven-year son of the clan MacDonald to a strong lean shoulder, and remarked, according to custom, 'Let's go and get Gwendolyn.'

Whereat young Angus remarked shrewdly, 'Not me; Sol Hanna's in there making love to her. He makes me sick, he does!'

Very slowly, Dan put the little boy down. To the child's impatient tugs he responded no more than a man in a dream. A bewildering surge of anger had possession of him. How dared this chump of a Hanna make love to Gwen—*Gwen!* Gwen was not to be made love to! She was to be left alone, left smiling, friendly, always there! She was to be there for him, Dan.

Then — just what did Angus mean by

‘making love’? To Dan’s mind flashed a picture of young Hanna sitting forward, one arm tentatively across the back of the sofa, Gwen turning toward him with that soft smile of hers, Hanna leaning nearer. A sudden vision of Gwenny’s upturned face gleamed on his inner vision; so sweet, so sweet! Dan clenched his nails into his palms and stood still, bracing every nerve to the onslaught of a sudden gust from the great Wind of Life. Over his whole being swept the rush of desire to kiss Gwendolyn, to hold her — to know her altogether and forever his.

Then his clear, steady mind began to work on the facts of this new world. He loved Gwen; he wanted to marry her; he wanted to ask her instantly, so that no fool could ever again make love to her.

But he could not marry! His twenty-five dollars a week was barely enough for his mother and himself; impossible for a third. The few hundred dollars in the bank, so painfully saved through the hard years of his cheated boyhood, meant the barest margin of safety for his mother, if — when — the army took him.

He could not marry, he must, how could he? — the endless chain of argument slipped

slowly through the cogs of his mind. And with the chain of argument slipped now a series of memory pictures . . . the day of his father's funeral, so dazingly soon after the day he came home to them feeling a little ill . . . he remembered his mother's low, tragic voice as she said, 'You must never blame your father, Dan; never. He was sure the invention would repay us our savings a thousandfold. I still believe he was right. If he had had just a little more time ——'

Yes, just a little more time. But there had been no time.

Then the day they moved from the dear home . . . his last day at high school . . . his first day at the shop — ugh! . . . the day he found out that his mother was paying the rent of their boxlike apartment by taking home work from the Donavan Paper Factory — *his mother!* (All sharply cut, etched in pain, these pictures.)

Then the day he had first met Gwenny at the boundary fence, merry, capable, school-girl Gwenny. (Painted in a mist of rose and sun, this.)

Since then, the years of happy boy-and-girl comradeship, beginning in a garden, Gwen's prize school-garden; continuing in a garden,

the vacant lot which had become his own treasure-field of vegetables and flowers. Picture after picture, all somehow full of the scent and color of flowers — Gwenny and the garden.

But always in the background of his thought was the other thought of the war. For this was the year 1916, and in the back of every young man's mind was the sense of a resistless force slowly but surely pulling toward the maelstrom.

Dan went home at last and tossed till late in the night on the bed where he had always slept with boyish soundness.

Next morning he met Gwen, rosy and trim, starting for her train. Dan felt himself flushing painfully.

'Hello, Gwen, why so early?' he said, falling into step.

'I am going to do extra work for a few weeks,' said Gwen, meeting his troubled eyes with her frank gaze. 'Why didn't you come over last night, Dan? I had a lot to tell you.'

'Angus said you had company,' said Dan, hesitatingly. His eyes avoided her.

Gwen studied him a moment with careless-seeming, veiled glances. The color rose in her cheeks.

‘Oh, Sol Hanna,’ she said, with purposeful lightness. Then rather as if she were plunging, she said, ‘Sol Hanna is all right; all the boys are nice friends — I am glad to have them. But they don’t really understand. You understand, because you and I are placed alike, Dan.’

‘How do you mean?’ said Dan, studying her face surprisedly.

‘Why,’ said Gwen, gravely, ‘you and I aren’t free, are we, for fooling round like most boys and girls? You have your mother, and I have promised to put the two children through school. I always feel that you and I have to stand by each other, because we are different. We —’ she hesitated — ‘we aren’t “open to engagement”; are we?’

Dan’s eyes clung to hers. The new, tense lines of his face broke and merged into a look of mingled relief and confidence.

‘Gwen!’ he said huskily.

Gwen’s mouth quivered, but she smiled her own open smile.

‘I depend on you, Dan,’ she said, ‘to stay pals with me. No matter who comes to see me it doesn’t mean anything. We are both bachelors, you and I, till our ship comes in.’

‘Till our ship comes in,’ Dan repeated

after her, like a vow. Then in a voice Gwen had never heard before, 'Thank you for telling me. Pals — always, Gwen!'

'Then that's all right,' said Gwenny, briskly, but with a broken note in her voice. Their eyes met and lingered. In the young man's was worshipful gratitude and pleading. In the girl's shy reassurance and the courage which was Gwen's most distinguishing trait.

When Dan had left her, she looked after him; he was striding along, head up, as if he had the world in his pocket. Gwen caught her breath. 'There, Mr. Angus MacDonald,' she murmured, 'I guess that antidotes your tattling. Sol Hanna! *Sol Hanna*, indeed, while Dan is in the world!'

At the shop, that day, Dan was even funnier than his wont, so droll that grins followed his wake from one end of the place to the other. The boy felt 'fey.' His heart was so big with love and thankfulness that he had to let off steam. For more in her looks than in her words, Gwen had said, 'Don't worry, Dan. There is no one else. I will wait for you.'

After this little episode the comradeship of Gwen and Dan was subtly different. There

was an assurance, an unassuming confidence in Dan's air; a little less poise, a hint more of girlish flutter in Gwen's. Still, for the most part, they kept the rôle of steady friendliness.

Then suddenly that too changed.

America was, at last, in the war. The draft came, and Dan was in the first call. There had been, of course, no question of his enlisting, he being, in Bible phrase, 'the only son of his mother, and she a widow' — a moneyless one.

The night before Dan left, Dan's mother said, 'Bring Gwen here, dear.'

Gwen came, at once. They talked together, the two women working furiously on things to add to his comfort. Before the evening was too late, Mrs. Merriman left them together quietly. Their defenses went down then. Gwen was in his arms and they were clinging to each other, in an ecstasy of grief and love. Her tears were wet on his cheeks and lips.

'You'll write, Gwen, you'll write? And you'll never love any one else?' he was saying. 'When I come back I'll soon be earning enough. Oh, Gwenny, say you will marry me then; say it!'

'When I come back' — how those words seared into the hearts of listening women, the

world over! What pictures rose unbidden to the eyes of mothers, wives, and sweethearts!

Gwen felt the sword in her heart. But she held herself away far enough to look into his eyes, to say solemnly, 'I will never love any one else, Dan. And I will marry you just as soon as you ask me, after you come back.'

Then, to lighten a strain which was too much for both, she said, 'But I don't mean to do all the promising, Dannie. Promise me *you'll* marry *me* when you come back.'

'Oh, Gwen!' In the midst of his trouble Dan smiled a boy smile. 'Will I marry you? Oh, Gwen!'

'Well?' said Gwen mischievously.

Dan put his arms closer about her; he drew her to him till his lips were against her mouth. So holding her he murmured, between passion and banter, 'I will marry you the minute you let me.'

'It's a bargain,' said Gwen, in the same tone.

But when their lips closed and clung together there was no banter left in either heart, only love, and incredible pain.

CHAPTER II

DAN MERRIAM's khaki-clad body lay almost as quiet in its huddled blanket as the bodies of those outside who would not be waking in the morning. It was dark in the dugout, his chance to sleep.

But Dan was not asleep, yet. He was holding his mind in an extraordinary concentration of imagination and memory which had gradually become a habit, had come to mean the salvation of his sanity in the senseless daily round of dirt, noise, and death.

In spirit he was leaving the world of trenches and dugouts. Away from the smells, the mud, the horrors, away from the noise. Now it was shut out . . . Now he was across the Atlantic, he was landing from the coast-wise steamer at the little fishing-wharf, as he had done that long-ago, marvelous vacation week. . . . Now he was at *the spot*. Oh, how beautiful! His feet trod silently the needle-carpeted trail through the cool secret wood of balsam and pine. Downhill now, sharper and sharper . . . turn by the big boulder — (he held his mind firmly, firmly, concentrating

heart and soul in escape from the body that lay so mutely in the dugout in France) downhill again. Now! . . . He was out on the great platform of gray rocks, bridging blue immensity of sea and sky. The spray towered and fell in a cascade of white drops all over the outer rocks.

The gulls — oh! the gulls! Wheeling, calling, settling on the crest of a wave like whiteness and space incarnate, they were of all creatures wildest and most beautiful.

Now he settled himself carefully in the sun-warmed hollow where the view was most absolutely perfect. He felt the rough-smooth caress of the granite. Now (concentrate, concentrate) it was no longer all granite. There was a rug spread beneath him. Beside him, close, sat a girl, her skirt fluttering in the wind, her knee against his cheek. If he should look up he would look into Gwen's smiling face, bent over to hear what he had to tell. But he would not look up: easier to hold this inner reality of the soul if he did not look up. He could see through his shut eyes how she smiled; he could feel the texture of her skirt against his cheek.

He began to tell her things . . . His soul was released.

As he grew drowsy, lulled by the summer sun, the faint cry of the gulls, he murmured, 'Good-night, sweetheart.' And slept — in his dugout in France.

Waking, this Dan was no sentimentalist. The self which had for years worked efficiently in the shop, mastering the technique of success in an uncongenial employment, developed into a resourceful campaigner. He was there to help win the war; with head and hand he helped to win it. And one of his most valuable assets in the task proved to be his gift of humor. He came to be counted on as one who could maintain or restore morale in his group. Drawn-faced boys would laugh themselves sane again at his drawled comments and descriptions. He developed a ludicrous knack of mimicry which had no sting in its accuracy. His monologues on 'The Lootenant and the First Class Private' became company classics, called for vociferously whenever entertainment was practical.

In the extraordinary jumble of human elements all tagged 'Private Soldier' there were personalities and contacts incredibly potent for laughter. Dan's quiet blue eyes absorbed

them all, and such as he could safely share he did. But some of the funniest acts so unconsciously staged for his benefit were not for reproducing in that company. Of such was the friendship and conversation of two privates whose bond of sympathy was hidden in mystery: a big, red-haired, slightly-brogued Irish-American, and an undersized, softly nasal-voiced, sharp-faced lad of Hebraic name, as quick-witted as his comrade was slow.

The Irishman cherished a mouth-organ above rubies. He played it plaintively, lingeringly, with melancholy and affection, producing the most astounding effects, provocative of communal mirth. He called the instrument 'me froot.' The Jew was by nature a chef; he could concoct edibles out of inedibles and appetizing dishes out of subordinate rations. Whenever in the course of human events, fire, food, and freedom met together for a brief space, the Hebrew made the 'feed,' to the boundless appreciation of the others. The Irishman accompanied the culinary exploits on his 'froot,' and Dan as inevitably extemporised monologues.

Far funnier, however, than the monologues he extemporized, were the spontaneous dia-

logues he overheard between the flutist and the cook. He longed to reproduce them, with certain finishing touches; but the originals were too close to all the hearers. Had Dan been an officer he could have regaled his comrades without hurting any one's feelings, but then he could scarcely have been in the way to collect the material.

There was always one safe audience, however for all thoughts fond or foolish — Gwen. And inevitably some of the alleviating absurdities of the day became a part of Dan's traffic with the dream-world. He told them to Gwen. His inner self delighted in sharing the delicious incongruities and human queernesses with her. He mimicked; developed a facility for odd accents; described drolly.

Of all the jests so gathered from the day for the night, the Irish-Jewish entente was the most fruitful of gaiety. The 'flood' played a rollicking strain of nonsense through them all. It was easy to imagine Gwen's laughter at the sayings and doings of the odd friends. Dan loved to set the scene for her in a few dry phrases, and then imitate the rich Irish brogue and the tangy New York Hebraisms. So presently, these so funny conversations became a notable part of the hidden life

which his second personality shared in imagination with Gwen.

And gradually he came to build all that hidden life of reflection and humor into a written communion with her. When he snatched a half-hour for writing it was his thoughts he told her of; her thoughts he asked for; and when things were quite too dark gray for even thoughts to flourish, he told her of 'the ffoot-player's' latest rhapsody, or sketched in bold strokes a new dialogue between flutist and cook, with occasional 'asides' from the eating chorus.

It was more fun to do these sketches than anything he had ever played or worked at. Thinking them out and writing them down was full of an eager, new kind of zest. He had an actual affection for them after they were done. Once he added, impulsively, at the end of a letter: 'If you want to keep some of these letters, Honey, I might like to remember these chaps some day. Their equal couldn't happen twice. But don't bother, of course, if you don't want to.'

Reading this sage suggestion, Gwen smiled as a mother might smile at a very small, only child. And after wearing the letter in a warm, safe place until the next replaced it, she put

it lingeringly away on top of the packet of others, in her most precious lacquer box. Keep some of them? As well remind Cornelia to keep her jewels!

CHAPTER III

ALMOST as soon as Dan's ship left the American dock, Gwen had been drawn into the swift current of war demands. She took, and triumphantly passed, the examinations for a position in the new Government offices. There she spent busy days, quietly neutralizing the joyous inefficiency of very young men who had recently become officers, and the fussy inefficiency of old men who had too long been inactive.

After a few weeks a new chief took over her department, a man of brains and energy, devoted totally to service. Gwen worked with him like a hand with its arm. In Colonel Smith she found a man whose intelligence and energy she could have enthusiasm in following.

Colonel Smith found in her a pluperfect assistant. He liked her so much, indeed, that he took some pains to tell his wife about her. And Mrs. Smith, who was the companion of his every mood, promptly sought Gwen's acquaintance. It was her way to be warm in appreciation of goodness or cleverness, wher-

ever found — especially her way to be warm toward any one who contributed to her husband's welfare.

Gwen responded with a shy yielding to the charm of the intelligent woman so vastly her superior in experience and breeding, but so like herself in directness and enthusiasm.

One day she discovered that Mrs. Smith was an author. She was no less than the Mary Mott Smith whose unusual travel books had set a sales record for the literature of travel. She had been in all corners of the world, and wrote about them so that you felt them as reasonable as your back yard, but as romantic as the fabled isles. She was distinctly a personage.

After that, naturally, Gwen was hers.

One afternoon Gwen met Mrs. Smith at the corner of the Gardens at Arlington Street. Both were headed for the devious way across to Charles Street.

Mrs. Smith began in the middle of things.

‘Miss Gwen,’ she said, ‘if you were not the busiest girl in the city, I should throw myself on your mercy and ask you to help me out. I am distracted with a piece of work that needs an intelligent hand.’

Gwen smiled questioningly. ‘Is it anything

I could do evenings?' she said. 'I should love to do *anything* for you.'

'It is typing my new book,' said Mrs. Smith. 'You must know I write by hand; I cannot compose on a typewriter. My secretary takes my disgraceful hieroglyphics and renders them into English type. Even my pet abbreviations and perverted punctuations have no mysteries for her. But, I think I told you, she is getting married this week — going West to live.'

Gwen murmured assentingly, consideringly.

'I have tried two secretaries already,' said Mrs. Smith, 'but my handwriting is too much for them. The publishers are waiting, the thing has a present bearing. But I cannot get speed from these strangers.'

'I think I can do it, Mrs. Smith,' said Gwen quietly. 'Suppose I try a chapter or two, and see how it goes.' She thought quickly. 'I could give you four evenings a week, till the book is done.'

Mrs. Smith sighed relief. 'You dear, dear girl!' she said, 'I would not let you sacrifice your precious evenings only that it seems so important. If I can be of any service for you, at any time, I hope you will come to me as frankly.'

‘I would, Mrs. Smith,’ said Gwen gravely.

She went the next evening to the Smiths’, and listened for an absorbed quarter-hour to the outline of the purpose and nature of the new book. Then she spent a few minutes looking carefully at some pages of handwriting. She asked a few, a very few questions. The handwriting offered no great difficulties to her keen, practiced eye. She made a quick, rough draft of a chapter, putting in the correct punctuation with painstaking thoroughness. After verifying a few dubious proper names, her intelligent grasp of the context solved the lesser problems. In half an hour Mrs. Smith was reading the rough draft. She looked up at Gwen, relief in her face.

‘It is like the good old times,’ she said, ‘will you start to-night?’

Gwen consented with an eager enthusiasm for any work which would bring her into close contact with Mrs. Smith. As the book progressed, this enthusiasm quickly developed into a strong liking for the work itself. She learned much from Mrs. Smith, and her skill and her mental outlook both grew by leaps and bounds. The task undertaken for friendliness became a genuine education in the humanities.

‘You could easily specialize in literary secretaryship, Gwen,’ said the author one day. ‘You have the patience and accuracy needed for research, and you are a positive genius at interpretation.’

‘Mrs. Smith,’ said Gwen impulsively, ‘there is something I want most dreadfully to do.’

‘What is it?’ said Mrs. Smith, with the quiet friendliness which made everything a matter of course.

‘It is about Dan’s letters,’ said Gwen rather hesitatingly. ‘Dan is —’

‘Your man,’ said Mrs. Smith, gently.

Color flooded Gwen’s face. ‘Yes, my man,’ she said, accepting the beautiful old phrase with proud wistfulness. ‘He writes — oh, Mrs. Smith, Dan is not an educated man; he never had a chance; but he is well born, and he speaks like his mother, who is a lady. And there is something about his letters — maybe you will not see it — maybe it is only my imagination — but it seems to me nobody ever wrote anything funnier than some of Dan’s letters to me!’

‘Funny?’ said Mrs. Smith, rather uncertainly.

Gwen blushed. ‘Not *all* funny, of course,’

she said, and laughed at herself. 'I am not telling it right. It is this: for a good while Dan's letters have not had very much news in them; I suppose there is not much he can tell — but they have been very wonderful.' For an instant her clear eyes misted over, then she went on, steadily. 'Parts of the letters lately have been little sketches, or dialogues, you might say, between two awfully funny characters. I don't know whether they are real or imaginary, but these two characters carry on the most absurd conversations, which somehow, in spite of the funniness of it, seem to tell you all about trench life. One of them plays a mouth-organ, which he calls his 'flood' and which he plays — oh, so perfectly! Every third or fourth letter has a new scene in it — and they really seem to me to build a story.' She hesitated and added, diffidently, 'A story of the brave humor of life over there.'

'That is unusual,' said Mrs. Smith. 'Your Dan must be very observing.'

'May I read you one or two parts of some letters, to-morrow?' said Gwen, with an effect of suddenness.

'I shall be honored,' said Mrs. Smith, gently.

Gwen hesitated over something she obviously wished to add, but in the end it remained unsaid.

The next evening, after their common task was done, Mrs. Smith referred to the matter graciously.

‘Have you brought the letters?’ she said.

Ten minutes later, the graciousness was gone from her expression, with all traces of the courteous mask which listeners must so often assume. Mary Mott Smith was pink with laughter. She was holding up a hand to stop Gwen. ‘Oh, wait, wait, I must not miss a word. Oh, my face *hurts!*’

Presently, interrupting suddenly, ‘No! That is not right; I don’t believe he meant the brogue like that. Let me see!’ (imperatively).

‘No — he meant it to sound like this,’ and infallibly the author reproduced the mellow but flat Irish vowels Dan had heard.

Gwen sat quivering, strained to some eager quest.

‘It would be great fun to transcribe that scene in form,’ said Mrs. Smith, consideringly.

Gwen clenched her hands. Her eyes deepened and her color glowed. But she held her-

self — held herself from too much hope. ‘I have been thinking,’ she said very low. ‘There are a good many of these dialogues. If I could — with your help — write them out correctly, maybe there would be a little money for Dan to come home to?’ Then like a person who has been hurrying upstairs she added, all breath — ‘Oh, a very, very little money, of course — but even a little money would be much to Dan.’

Mrs. Smith leaned to her, ‘My dear,’ she said, ‘I hardly think there could be any other scenes as good as the ones you have read me. Those are little short of genius.’

‘There are more! There really are, Mrs. Smith!’ cried Gwen. ‘Can you let me read some more? I’ve typewritten them all — just these funny parts.’

‘No child, don’t read them. Give them to me,’ said Mrs. Smith, ‘I will read them by myself; I can tell more about them that way.’

‘Oh, *will* you?’ Gwen’s face was suddenly beautiful.

So Gwen left the precious transcript with her friend, and went home dreaming, hoping, refusing to fear.

CHAPTER IV

HOPE was justified of her devotee. On Gwen's next visit, Mrs. Smith came into the room, hands outstretched.

'My dear,' she said, 'you were right. They are *all* good! Quite unbelievably good!'

Then she sobered into the professional look. 'It will be rather a job to get them into shape,' she said.

'You — you *do* think they might be published?' said Gwen, very low.

'I think, if we can add as many more, they will make a book,' said Mrs. Smith, quietly. 'They need only a little editing. Perhaps here — and here —' She fluttered rapidly through the pages — 'we would put a thread of connecting narrative.'

'A book? A book for Dan!' It had been the secret dream of Gwen's heart for weeks. Too bright a dream to be risked in the glare of day, she had hidden it with a cloak of words. But now it might be translated in reality. Her pulses raced.

'I have a name for the book,' she said softly.

'Already?' said Mrs. Smith, quizzically.

‘Yes, “The Magic Flute”!’ said Gwen.

‘“*The Magic Flute*”?’ Surprise, appreciation, laughter, succeeded each other in Mrs. Smith’s eyes. ‘“The Magic Flute,”’ she repeated. Then thoughtfully, “Sounding its absurd notes through all the discordant clamor; summoning courage and healing laughter — ‘why, Gwenny!’”

With a moisture in her eyes, Mrs. Smith looked at the little earnest person so surprisingly revealing herself. ‘My child,’ she said, ‘I believe it will be better for you to take these letters, yourself, and carry out your own ideas. Come to me with a batch at a time, as to an editor, and I will tell you any better spellings or settings that occur to me; but first, give your own ideas a chance. You have an instinct about this piece of work, because you understand Dan. I might spoil it.’

‘Oh, never,’ said Gwen, almost in horror. ‘But, indeed, I would love to try. With you to stop *me* from spoiling it, I could dare.’

‘Then that is that,’ said Mrs. Smith, briskly. ‘Shall you tell Dan what you are doing?’

Gwen shook her head, gently but positively.

‘No,’ agreed Mrs. Smith, ‘it would risk his spontaneity.’

‘I should not even ask his permission before publishing,’ said Gwen. ‘Oh, *if* any one will publish it!’

‘I think some one will,’ said Mrs. Smith. ‘Real humor is a rare comer to the publisher’s desk, and this is as real as life itself.’

‘The truth is,’ said Gwen, with some difficulty, ‘I am afraid things are going to be hard for Dan; his mother has failed a good deal, since — he went away.’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Smith, ‘mothers do.’

Gwen put her hand to her throat.

‘I love her so,’ she said. ‘She needs comforts and care. Dan could have given her that.’

Her voice broke off.

‘Is it serious?’ said Mrs. Smith.

‘Something wrong with her heart,’ said Gwen, steadying herself. ‘Two attacks since Dan went.’

‘She has, I suppose, no money except what Dan sends?’ said Mrs. Smith.

‘No; Dan told me to use his savings for her if she should be ill or anything. He put all he had in a joint account with my name and hers before he went. He knew she would not use anything for herself. She is like that.’

‘Mothers are,’ said Mrs. Smith, again.

‘I have not had to use any yet,’ said Gwen contentedly.

Mrs. Smith looked keenly at her; then she smiled, slowly. ‘A joint bank account covers a multitude of — deposits,’ she said, slyly.

Gwen blushed, till her little ears were white against the flood of scarlet. Suddenly she put her head on Mrs. Smith’s shoulder, by some gentle motion in the exact position to invite a head.

‘Of course I do!’ she said with some irrelevance. ‘Do you think I am going to let his savings go, and have him come home to nothing? And I earning a good salary? But he mustn’t know, and she mustn’t know. They — wouldn’t let me!’

‘Nobody shall know from me,’ said Mrs. Smith, tightening an arm about Gwen. Then, whimsically, ‘It is our sacred privilege to deceive our men for their own good.’

CHAPTER V

FOR Dan in France the weeks were years long in experience, in toil, in strains and reactions, in horrors seen, dealt, feared. Yet such was the urge and haste of the war machinery in those culminating months that sometimes time seemed annihilated in experience, and the whole adventure but a passing instant. He lived the life set for him, and waited deep within his soul's entrenchments for release. And he wrote to Gwen.

To Gwen, in Boston, the time was so crowded that fear and longing were held at bay. She was glad to fill every waking moment with work. After office hours she walked home, for her health's sake. In the evenings she acted as Mrs. Smith's secretary. Later she gave the four evenings to rolling bandages with a group of workers. The remaining two evenings were sacred to Dan's book. Those were the glowing moments of the week — the great indulgence. As she worked she was so close to Dan's spirit that she seemed to feel him in the room beside her. And nearly every night she ran in to chat with Dan's

mother for just a few moments between supper and work.

The home clan was getting so grown up that it rather overflowed the cottage, and when Anna began to hold a precocious court of young men, and Angus brought home a leggy chum, and Margaret clamored to have her 'best girl-friend' included, the beleaguered father and mother were reconciled to Gwen's increasing absence, even though she was and would be their most reliable and understanding child.

One evening Gwen literally fled from the tumult of family and guests which not even her closed bedroom could shut out. She took her precious pages of Dan's book across to Mrs. Merriam's tiny apartment, and laughing, begged that she might work there.

The gladness that leaped to the fragile face opposite her fairly startled Gwen. Mrs. Merriam took her light coat in spite of her protest, and hung it up. Her hands trembled. She moved with steps as light as a girl's to the other door from the living-dining-room where she had been sitting. 'If you do not like to write here,' she said, 'you can always have Dan's room. You know his big work-table that he made.' She threw open Dan's

bedroom door, and faced Gwen with a tremulous, excited smile.

Gwen's heart swelled. 'You poor little love, how lonely you are!' she thought. She went to stand beside the other, an arm about her. Together they looked about Dan's room. It was immaculately neat. On the bureau was a glass of flowers, fresh, beautifully arranged.

Gwen's arm tightened. She laid her fresh cheek against the soft, thin mother cheek.

Dan's work-table stood by the one window, fresh ink in the bottle, the books he had been reading piled at the side, his especially contrived lamp in place, everything just as Gwen had so often glimpsed it in the younger days.

Gwen went forward and laid her packet of papers and pencils on the table; she passed her hand lightly, caressingly over the top; turned on the light. Mrs. Merriam, standing still in the doorway watched with tender, wistful eyes.

Gwen moved swiftly back and took the little face in both palms. 'I should love to work here this evening,' she said, 'if you are sure the machine will not bother you?'

'I shall be glad of a little noise,' said Mrs. Merriam, patting the hand Gwen released from her cheek.

Gwen slipped across lots and in the kitchen door; up the stairs and back again with her small portable machine, before the merry crew in her house had caught sight of her.

Back in Dan's room she settled herself comfortably at his broad, firm table. The door remained open; the click-clack of the typewriter became steadier, more rapid. The fair head bent over it gleamed in the electric light from Dan's lamp. In the other room the older woman softly changed her position so that she might feast her eyes on that warm young presence. The sweater she was knitting slid absently through her fingers; the click of the machine broke the heavy silence she had grown to dread, and filled the room with the assurance of life. A look of rapture grew on the sharpened features.

Over Gwen's mood stole gradually a content that transcended any enjoyment of a place or a task she had ever known. Here there was quiet without solitude; the presence of the other woman made itself felt with the unobtrusiveness of light. Gwen sensed as if it were through the back of her head, an affection, a pleasure in her work and in her company.

Looking around, suddenly, after a final

absorbed half-hour on one of Dan's best dialogues, she saw Mrs. Merriam's face wholly off guard. Gwen caught her breath, and forgot what she had turned to say. The whole yearning mother heart, and the lonely little-girl heart of the sick woman was caught up in that shining, brooding look. It changed, of course, to meet the startled glance of the girl; a veil dropped. Only affection and pleasure remaining, as the gentle voice said,

‘Finished, dear?’

‘Finished for to-night,’ said Gwen, slowly. ‘May I leave my things here, and come again day after to-morrow?’

Mrs. Merriam rose, eagerly. ‘It is wonderful to have you,’ she said. ‘I wish I had you always. Please come early; I will have supper ready.’

‘Oh, lovely!’ said Gwen. ‘But we will make it together. Well, good-night, little dear.’

Still she lingered. She looked about the room again, a trifle uncertainly. Dan's face smiled at her from a photograph — a younger photograph than the one on her own bureau. Dan's work-table stood in its steady plainness, its inviting useableness. Dan's mother faced her, wistful, frail, something pleading dumbly in her eyes.

Gwen's heart began to beat with a curious excitement. A startling but pleasing thought was fluttering its way into her consciousness.

Putting her hand over her mouth with a child's notion, as if the thought might escape her, in words, she made an end of good-nights and hurried out of the house across to her own.

CHAPTER VI

AT home, the younger fry had departed; Mrs. MacDonald was tidying up an extra bit and giving a last look to the bread dough, neatly covered against the morrow's baking.

'Did you get on well with your work, child?' she said, as Gwen came in.

'Yes, Mother,' Gwen's smile was warm, but her tone absent. Then she said, hesitatingly, 'It is a wonderful place to work — so quiet.'

'Too quiet for the lone body,' said Annie wisely.

'Oh, yes!' said Gwen. 'I never realized how little and alone she is before, Mother! I could hardly bear to leave her there. I would have stayed the night, I do believe, if she had asked me!'

'She would not ask you,' said the mother.

'She will never ask anything of anybody,' said Gwen, 'never anything. She will just go on, bearing the loneliness, and doing for herself when she isn't able, and getting frailer — till some day it is too late to help.'

Her hands clasped themselves tightly. Her

eyes were fixed widely on a vision of pity and fear. She was telling herself, rather than her mother, some truth she was discovering as she told it.

‘Is it so bad as that?’ said Annie, thoughtfully.

‘Mother, she was like a child that’s having a party!’ said Gwen, her eyes misting. ‘Just to have me there — not even talking or doing a thing for her. You should have seen her!’

Mrs. MacDonald studied Gwen’s face.

‘What’s on your mind, child?’ she said, comfortably.

Gwen paused, a long considering pause. She was not the one to leap and then climb regretfully back. Leap she did, sometimes, but with a clear eye and the will to keep on going.

‘Mother, darling,’ she said at last, ‘I have a feeling I must take care of Dan’s mother. I have a feeling that there is a call now. I don’t want to fail you in any way — but if you could spare me for a time I believe I would go and live with Mrs. Merriam.’

Mrs. MacDonald made no exclamation. To Gwen’s exceeding surprise she said, calmly,

‘Maybe you ought, child. It has come to me once or twice of late that we should be

looking out for the wee body a bit better.'

'Oh, *Mother!*' Gwen's arms went round the plump figure. 'What a blessed darling you are! If any of us are ever half as good as you are it will be a miracle.'

'Nonsense, child.' Annie MacDonald brushed the estimate aside with an indulgent smile. 'It's no very wonderful goodness to have a heart for the mother of your own girl's lad — and her a widow and sick!'

'But, Mother, could you really manage?'

Mrs. MacDonald recovered the dough, methodically, and sat down in a kitchen chair, her hands folded calmly in her lap.

'Anna could well be giving me a hand evenings as you used to,' she said. 'It is not too good for her to spend all her time with the young men. As for your board, your father is making wonderful wages in the shipyard, as you know. If you can help Dan's mother now while she's needing it, we who have no sons at the war can surely go without your bit of money.'

Gwen laid her cheek on her mother's fair hair, where the gray hardly showed. 'You and father are the salt of the earth,' she said unsteadily. 'I am proud to belong to you.'

Annie sniffed, vigorously, 'I suppose you

think, maybe, we're no proud of yourself?' she said, relapsing as she rarely did, into Scotch.

Then the practical side of her nature reasserted itself. 'But you would be taking a double burden, lassie,' she said. 'You would pay your share, of course, and in the work she'll never again keep up her end.'

'I don't care, Mother,' said Gwen, very low. 'If I go I shall go to give her all the comfort she can get. It will be my bit — you understand?'

Mrs. MacDonald nodded.

'It is what I would do in your place,' she said.

So, in a few moments of quiet talk in the quiet kitchen, the step was decided on. And it was taken a few days later, with equal quietness, for Gwen found Dan's mother incredulously, adoringly in favor.

In a week after Gwen moved across to her, Mrs. Merriam could hardly recall that she had ever been lonely or uncared for. Warmth and sweet consideration tingled in the air about her. She smiled and throve on it as a plant responds to the spring sun.

Gwen rather burned the candle at both ends. She rose early, peeped into Mrs. Merriam's

room to say good-morning on her way to start the coffee. Came back in a surprisingly few minutes with a tray bearing coffee and toast.

The first morning this happened Dan's mother had been tragic about it — if Gwen was to wait on her at the beginning of a day's work, she would get up at five and forestall her; it was outrageous! The tender voice was as nearly indignant as Gwen had ever heard it.

But Gwen went on unmovedly arranging tray and pillows, kissing her while she explained in a matter-of-fact way, that she had always longed to have some one to fuss over; that now she had some one, and she intended to make the most of it.

After a day or two of futile rebellion the older woman settled thankfully into the wonderful new régime. Breakfast in bed. Knitting or mending by the sunny window all day, with short intervals of easy housework. Getting herself milk and bread, or broth, at noon. Dusting; starting the vegetables for dinner. She soon learned that to do too much brought a shadow of unhappiness to Gwen's face, and as that face had become the sunshine of her life she did not lightly risk clouding it.

Dinner with Gwen was an event. Glowing,

alert, full of the breath of the world's life, the girl would come just at six, sometimes bearing bundles; sometimes she would have purchased and sent supplies in the morning. Then she would move about, chatting, telling about things and people while her housewifely hands worked methodically.

Mrs. Merriam hovered helpfully, and listened, putting in a stimulating question or exclamation in her soft, thrilled voice.

At seven they sat down to a perfect little dinner. Gwen ate the sparest of lunches; all her money and appetite was saved for this function of the day, which meant so much to her housemate. So, within the limits of the war rationing, they had both variety and quality in their diet. And talk they had of the best, for as they knew each other better they found each other even more congenial than they had supposed. Gwen was more developed in taste and feeling than Mrs. Merriam had divined, and Dan's mother was more vigorous of mentality behind the veil of her illness and gentleness than Gwen had realized.

After dinner came a leisurely clearing-up in which the older woman did her share with a beautiful precision that enchanted Gwen. Then the work of the evening, the transcribing

and editing. This became an absorbing passion to Gwen, having its pleasure not only in service to Dan, but in the work itself. There came a time when she said to herself, 'This is what I want to do; this is what I *can* do; help write things. Some day I will do this.'

CHAPTER VII

HORACE BESLEY of 'Stropers, Publishers' was pleased when his secretary said, in her smooth, low voice, 'Mrs. Smith is on the wire, Mr. Besley; Mary Mott Smith.'

'How are you, Mary?' he spoke into the transmitter. 'What have you been doing with yourself?'

'Hunting up treasure for you, Horace,' said the charming voice at the other end of the wire. 'I have something great for Stropers.'

'I say,' said Besley, 'this sounds exciting. Is it your own?'

'No,' said the voice, with a hint of laughter. 'It will be a bigger money-maker for you than my stuff, if it goes as I think it will. It is something absolutely new, Horace, a new note altogether, by two wholly unknown authors. I am sending one of them to you to-day, with the book. I want you to promise me you will read the thing right off. As a personal favor?'

'What is this, Mary?' said Besley. 'Are you really as enthusiastic as you sound? Are we on the brink of a great discovery?'

‘You are on the brink of some consuming laughter,’ said Mary Smith. ‘But there are tears in it. Don’t ask me about it, Horace. Just give me an hour at which you can see my author.’

‘Him author, or her author, Mary? Of course I will see ’em.’

‘This one is a girl, Horace. I’d like you to draw her out a bit before you let her go. And read the manuscript very soon; yes?’

‘Most certainly, yes, Madame. Your wish is law always to your humble servant. One moment.’ Besley turned his head to his secretary. ‘Can I see an author to-day, Miss Downs? Give me a free half-hour.’

‘At three-thirty, Mr. Besley, if you get out of the two o’clock powpow in time. You are due at the Union Club at four, for the French Commissioner.’

‘Send your author at three-thirty, Mary,’ said Besley into the telephone. ‘What’s her name?’

‘Miss Gwendolyn MacDonald. Thank you so much, Horace. Good-bye.’

Thus did Mary Mott Smith prepare the way for Gwendolyn’s first visit to the terrifying precincts of a publisher.

When Gwen arrived, precisely at three-

thirty that afternoon, she was taken at once to Horace Besley's sanctum. Her usher preceded her through a room of clacking typewriters, down a small corridor, through another room, chiefly books and solemn, high desks, and then to a closed door, at which she knocked.

A rather deep, very definite voice said, 'Come,' and Gwen's conductor pushed open the door and retired, leaving Gwen to enter alone.

It was a small, book-lined room she entered, and the row of sunny windows in the back wall looked directly out over the green remoteness of the old Burying Ground. This fact came in a curious flash to Gwen's eyes and mind, while the more forward part of her observation took in the unobtrusive glance of the secretary, at a small desk in the foreground at the left, and then dwelt absorbedly on the face and figure of the man who had risen from a deep mahogany desk at the right and who was greeting her with brief, but distinguished, courtesy. He was very slight, rather tall, extremely elegant. Black hair and eyebrows darkened eyes which were really hazel. The face was the face of a dreamer — an idealist.

Gwen thought, 'He will be fearfully critical. He looks foreign, but I am sure he is an American. Oh, *will* he be kind?'

Horace Besley thought, 'Pretty creature — competent, too — make a darned good secretary. Not the literary type, though. If the book is hers, Mary Smith has drawn a blank.'

In the meantime he had taken and dropped Gwendolyn's hand firmly, swiftly, had motioned her to the chair which sat facing him, and had seated himself.

Gwen's blue eyes met his dark, probing glance, and instantly she knew that he *was* kind, as kind as critical. She held the flat packet of manuscript in her lap, and smiled at him tremulously.

'I — I have a book here,' she said, and Horace Besley got a confusing impression that she touched a child with a caressing hand, 'that Mrs. Smith thinks very funny. I think it is funny myself. Would you be willing to read it — to see if — possibly — you might —' she quite obviously found it hard to get the daring words out — 'might publish it?'

'Funny?' said Mr. Besley, raising black eyebrows rather quizzically. 'Do you mean, a humorous book?'

'Yes, I am afraid I do,' said Gwen, as one

who states a damaging fact, deprecatingly. 'This book is quite humorous.'

'Well, don't let's be tragic about it,' said the dark, foreign-looking personage, smiling faintly. 'There are worse things than humor, after all. Though to be sure,' he added, gently, 'Stropers does not deal much in humor, these days. Are you the author, Miss MacDonald?'

'No, oh, no,' a flush swept the delicate cheek-contour opposite him, 'I am just — a kind of editing secretary. This book is — mostly — the letters of a friend of mine, a man in France.'

'Ah?' Besley's polite interest took on a shade of spontaneity. Then, sensing the swift passage of the thirty minutes allotted this visitor, he addressed himself with skill and tact to the familiar task of 'getting the story,' whatever it might be.

Under the magnetic power of those dark, swiftly glancing eyes, those quiet, sympathetic questions, Gwen rose to complete unconsciousness of self, and poured out the story of her treasure. Watching her glowing face, her firm, fine hands, Horace Besley became presently aware of a second, an unseen personality, brought into the room by her words.

Gradually he seemed to know a boy, hardy, merry, and brave; a boy who was a dreamer and lover of beauty, but who worked always with his hands among common people, and common things, to earn his bread. This boy had the courage to find mirth in hardship, nonsense in misfortune. And now this boy became a type of many boys — American boys in France. He — they — made drollery a shield and buckler against despair. And their drolleries were set down here, in a kind of connected story, he gathered — in the book this pretty child held in her lap.

In spite of himself, curiosity and warmth touched him for the manuscript. He told himself it was a pity — hateful job to bring disappointment to that eager face. Why could he never learn to be indifferent? Yet — after all — one did sometimes get a good book — well, he would have a go at it, to-night.

After Gwen left, he turned to his secretary. ‘See that this is put with my things, will you, Miss Downs? I’ll take it home to-night.’

The secretary nodded. She had a disillusioned point of view about authors.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN her chief had been gone some twenty minutes to the Union Club, Miss Downs took up the manuscript, glancing at it without undue curiosity.

It was beautifully prepared. The workmanlike job struck her eye. She turned a few pages, approving almost audibly.

As she fluttered the sheets, something caught her attention; — a quaint phrase that made her smile. She read further — further. A chuckle escaped her surprised lips. She sat down, absently, still reading.

Ten minutes later, Besley came in quickly. He was excited, elated.

‘Just give me what I must sign,’ he said. ‘I think I will call it a day. Brown and Durmont are going out home with me to talk that “Y” plan over.’

Then his quick eye flicked at the manuscript in her hand. ‘Eh? So good as that? You are positively reading it?’ Miss Downs rose to put the manuscript in his bag. Her face was flushed with a light of laughter he had seldom seen there.

‘Mr. Besley,’ she said, ‘this is the funniest thing we have ever had. It is as funny as “Pigs is Pigs.”’

The secretary’s approval was an omen. Dan’s letters ran the gamut of the Readers and the subsequent ‘Pow-wow,’ without receiving one serious blow. The book was almost railroaded into acceptance.

The letter which came to Gwen two weeks later, and which left her breathless, starry-eyed, bewildered with happiness, enclosed for her signature duplicate contracts promising a royalty of ten per cent on the list price, which the letter said would probably be set at two dollars.

Gwen’s business-trained mind leaped at the implication. Two hundred dollars a thousand! If the sales ran to ten thousand Dan would have two thousand dollars to come home to! It was an Elysian prospect.

But she had experience enough in business to know the inevitable other possibility, and she showed no change of countenance when Besley said, in a friendly second interview,

‘I ought to warn you, Miss MacDonald, that there is a kind of unaccountability about books. No one can really predict a success. We flatter ourselves that we do not often guess

wrong, yet we have quite a considerable little graveyard on our shelves.'

'Buried hopes?' said Gwen, smiling faintly.

'Buried investments,' said Besley, 'books that never paid the cost of production.'

'Yes, I can see that,' said Gwen quietly, 'but all business ventures are gambles in a way, aren't they? I suppose the author gambles his time and labor; the publisher gambles his money and name. Oh, I *do* hope this gamble will win big stakes.'

'So do we. I believe it will,' said Mr. Besley, with a sincere flash of the keen dark eyes. 'And I may tell you that there is a good prospect of a very early publishing date for you. You may consider yourself lucky in that, for we cannot always put out a book just when the author would like to have us.'

His conservative phrases carried no hint to Gwen of the months or even years of waiting to which some authors were condemned. Indeed, she hardly listened to his words, though her manner was one of closest attention. For her whole being was singing a pæan of thanksgiving and prayer, for Dan and his book.

The good fortune which had folded the

book in its protecting cloak seemed of durable nature. The manuscript was put through the presses during the summer. It looked as if the 'Magic Flute' might be piping its way to the public ear for Christmas sales.

The first batch of proof was too keen a joy to Gwen to taste unshared. Also, she felt that Dan's mother ought to know the secret, now that the venture was safely launched. She, and she alone, not even Gwen's own loved mother. It was her right, surely. So Gwen told her the whole story, sitting on a footstool by the older woman's knee, their hands clasping or loosening as the thrilling narrative progressed from the timid birth of the idea in Gwen's imagination to the incredible present glory of the first proof-sheets.

'You say it is Dan's letters — Dan's funny letters, and you have made it into a book for him — and it is going to be *published*?' Such a stress of incredulous delight on the verb!

'Published by *Stropers*,' countered Gwen, piling glory on glory.

'I can't, I really can't sense it,' murmured Mrs. Merriam, tremulously. 'I would almost have died to have my boy educated — and I could not. And now, a book!'

'Yes, dear, I know,' said Gwen, her own

lips trembling. 'We are going to be so proud of him. But we must keep the secret, till we are sure the book is a success. Mr. Besley says you never can tell just what people are going to like.'

'Let me read it, Gwen!'

So Gwen read to her the pages which had been put into galley proof. Before she had finished, laughter had chased away tears, and pride was shining in the mother's eyes.

'It is his father in him,' she said exultantly, 'his father's gayety and courage. Never were times so hard or disappointments so great that he could not make me laugh with a joke. He would have been something big if he had had just a little more time.'

'Dan is not all his father,' said Gwen, gently. 'I see you in him often.'

'How did you do it, Gwen?' said the mother fondly. 'Did you just take the letters as they were?'

Gwen flushed and hesitated. 'No,' she said, at last honestly, 'I could not quite do that. These little scenes just came into the letters as they happened, hit-or-miss. Sometimes there were no beginnings or endings. So I filled in some things. I guess I builded around Dan's descriptions, if you know what

I mean. That is why,' she went on, slowly, 'I felt that I must sign both our initials to the book; it was not fair to make Dan responsible for some things he might not like when he saw them. I called it "by D. M. and G. M."'

'Oh, my dear, to think Dan does not know what you have been doing for him!'

'He is not to know till we are sure it is going to be all right,' said Gwen, positively, 'if the book should not sell he must never know at all.'

CHAPTER IX

ONE cold twilight, early in November, Gwen came home to find Mrs. Merriam fairly at the door, her face alight with eagerness.

‘Dear,’ she said, ‘there is a package from Stropers! It does feel like books, it does!’

Gwen was at the table in two steps. The beautifully neat publisher’s bundle was staring up at her. Mechanically she took off coat, gloves, hat. By force of habit she put them away, while her hands were aching to leap on the package. Then with one reassuring hug to the little figure hovering at her side, she clipped every tape and unfolded the stiff, brown wrappings with sure swift fingers. Before them lay the marvel, the published book — Dan’s book!

To be accurate, there were six books in the parcel, and a note of good wishes from Mr. Besley, saying that these were the author’s gift copies, and that Stropers hoped she would be pleased with the binding, which he — Besley — thought rather nice considering the natural limitations as to material, etc., these days.

But neither Gwen nor Mrs. Merriam paid the least attention to numbers or note. Each seized a volume and fingered it, opened and read its title page, fluttered its leaves, exulted over it. Each called the other's attention to details in the complete marvel. They laughed, they exclaimed, they kissed. There is nothing quite like a first book, to author, to author's mother. And this first book was not only all that a first book usually is; both women felt that its modest covers held a potential insurance for their fighting man. Always behind their spoken thoughts of him was the unspoken knowledge that he might come home ill or disabled, and to both the book had secretly come to mean a measure of safety for Dan. To Gwen it also augured help for the little mother if things went badly with Dan's earning power.

That very week Gwen saw notices of the 'Magic Flute' in the 'Transcript' and the 'Sunday Herald,' just publishers' notices, of course, the preliminary of reviews. Mr. Besley called her up a few days later, according to Stropers' gracious custom, to tell her that a warm response had come in from their district headquarters. 'Chicago' prophesied a fine sale. 'California' was delighted. There were

days of elation, of hope underlying all anxieties.

Then, suddenly, the unbelievable relief from anxieties, the universal delirious joy of the Armistice!

Gwen and Dan's mother accepted it in a daze of happiness, a mist of laughter and tears. It had come! It had come! Peace, at last. No more beautiful boys killed or maimed or spoiled! No more hideous hunger for women and little children. Peace, peace at last.

'How soon do you suppose they will begin sending them home?' the mother murmured, when they could speak coherently.

'I don't know, dear. I will ask Colonel Smith what he thinks. But anyway, no matter how long it is, just think, he is not fighting! He is in no danger, he is safe, dear, safe!'

What caught at her heart as she said the last words? What chill finger touched her spine? Gwen shivered. But her mind reassured her, 'Superstition, that is what I am feeling. The old feeling that everything good is just too good to be so.'

She was the gayer, the more reassuring, with Dan's mother for the momentary qualm.

But that night, lying long awake for excite-

ment and thankfulness, Gwen found down at the bottom of her consciousness something dark, something uneasy, that tried to contradict the goodness of her knowledge. She probed for it, determined to bring it to the light, and examine it. Often she had found that such uneasy hints of trouble could be brought out and either reasoned away or acted on. So now she strove.

But there was nothing. Or was there something? Oh, yes, but how absurd! There was that sudden nervous chill when she had said that Dan was safe. Just a superstitious reaction.

She lay there, following her thoughts far out over the November sea. Ships — now could the great ships again go lighted on their way to and from France and England! The night would no longer be a black horror for travelers. Ships — the coast — she had never seen the coast of France, but she imaged something white and mysterious, rising in cliffs out of the dark sea. Had some one spoken of chalk cliffs? Then on shore. Her thoughts now became like a little questing dog in strange territory, seeking hither and thither. She would have liked so much to picture Dan rejoicing with his comrades over the Armis-

tice, but she knew nothing of France, or the army. She could not set the scene. Persistently alien images came before her consciousness.

Suddenly a great confused heap of earth and wire, boards and stones, presented itself to her imagination, and as she gazed at it in fancy, something like a pallid hand moved in the edge of the heap, feebly.

Gwen moaned, and woke from half-sleep, pushing away the shadowy concepts. She sat up, her nerves on edge. All she had heard of No Man's Land — of exploding shells and wandering, wounded figures, seemed to be coming alive and surrounding her with palpable fear.

‘But it is over, *over*,’ she said to herself. ‘Oh, thank God!’

She had prayed long that night. But now she clasped her hands on her breast and threw her very soul out into the void of intercession. She prayed for protecting and merciful arms to surround her love, to bear him up and lead him to safety wherever he was. ‘Oh, save him, save him,’ she found herself praying most amazingly. ‘Save him and shelter him, cover him with the wings of Thy mercy and bring him home to us.’ It was as if, suddenly, she had received a message that Dan was in

danger — that in spite of the Armistice it was not well with him.

Finally, toward morning, she fell into a deep exhausted sleep, dreamless. When she awoke she found Mrs. Merriam by her bedside, holding a tray. She had turned the tables for once, and was bringing Gwen her breakfast in bed.

Gwen forebore to scold. She was glad of the coffee. Something still hung over her from the night, dulling the brilliant promise of the day.

But she made merry with Dan's mother, adequately, and when breakfast was over she started for the joy-intoxicated city in something akin to the normal mood of rejoicing. As the day wore on, indeed, she recovered her tone, and almost forgot the disturbed fears and fancies of the night.

Almost. Perhaps they lived on in her memory deeply overlaid by the experiences of the next crowded, exciting days, not quite forgotten. The third day after the Armistice brought a long-expected letter from Dan. It was elixir to their souls, Gwen's and Mrs. Merriam's, though it was written weeks before the great sequel. Steadfast, though weary, the written sentences imprinted them-

selves on Gwen's mind as embodying a deep confidence, a secure foreknowledge of order. They reëstablished contact, gave the lie, somehow, to morbid imaginings.

CHAPTER X

SOMETIME during the second week after the Armistice, Gwen became aware that Mrs. Merriam was not quite as well as she had been. She ate less, moved about more restlessly. Sometimes in the morning, Gwen thought she looked as if she had not slept. Once she admitted that she had had the old pain during the night.

‘Darling,’ said Gwen, greatly disturbed, ‘you must positively wake me if you feel bad in the night. I beg of you not to lie there and suffer. Promise me?’

Mrs. Merriam promised, deprecatingly. It was really nothing, she averred — only a silly fright that came over her because it seemed so hard to breathe.

‘But Doctor Miles left medicine for those attacks,’ said Gwen, protestingly, ‘and besides, I want to be with you. I don’t want you to lie there in the dark and get nervous.’

So Mrs. Merriam had promised.

In the night of the first day of December, Gwen woke from a deep sleep to find herself sitting up in the blackness and exclaiming,

‘Yes, what is it?’ to what at first seemed to be a child calling to her in a dream.

Then she knew that the voice was at her bedroom door, that it was Mrs. Merriam’s voice, calling gaspingly, ‘Gwen, oh, Gwen!’

She was out of bed and had the door open in one bound of her lithe body. In the half-light beyond the opened door a little, huddling figure in white nightgown and bare feet was holding its laboring chest with clutching hands. ‘Oh, I am frightened, I am frightened!’ the blue lips were moaning.

Gwen was instantly as awake as if she had been up an hour. Stilling her own leaping heart, she half lifted, half led the piteous little figure into her own bed, talking quietly, soothingly, as she drew the warm covers over her closely.

“Gweny will take care of you. We’ll soon have the pain gone. Don’t be frightened, dearest.”

Gwen had her own feet in slippers and her wrapper tied about her by now.

She brought hot water and the medicine Dr. Miles had left. She rubbed and chafed tenderly. But the pain persisted.

Mrs. Merriam was sitting up in the covers, moaning and gasping again, when Gwen came

back from a lightning trip to the kitchen. Still with a steady voice and reassuring look, Gwen slipped from the room and telephoned the doctor, low-voiced, but urgently. She had stockings on and her hair tossed up somehow, with pins, by the time he came, so that she could work more freely.

Dr. Miles was a big man, gaunt in the face from hard thinking and stern dieting, but heavy in body from the constant work which kept him from the open-air exercise he so earnestly recommended to his stout patients. He was very calm, as he sat holding Mrs. Merriam's fluttering hand. Asked very few questions.

'Well, now I guess,' he said, after a brief examination, with the labored breathing that bespoke the speed of his coming, 'we will just make you comfortable, Mrs. Merriam. I will give you a little something to quiet the pain, and you will get a night's sleep.'

As he spoke, he was gently rolling up the nightgown sleeve on the tiny, frail arm. Gwen winced to see how much frailer it was than she had thought.

His preparations were briefly and inconspicuously made, with Gwen's help. In a few minutes the hypodermic was given, the fragile

arm soothed and rubbed, and warmly covered. And soon Mrs. Merriam's tense body began to relax. The little face lost its terror and in a weak, wandering voice Mrs. Merriam expressed her relief and thanks. 'I'll soon be all right, now,' she murmured, drowsily, and to Gwen's infinite relief, she presently slept.

Dr. Miles sat watching her for a half hour, taking her pulse from time to time. He asked Gwen a few more questions, out in the living-room, before he left, but he made no statements. 'I will be in early in the morning,' he said; 'if you need me again, call me. Otherwise I will come in on my way to the hospital, before eight.' Gwen let him out into the gray dawn. Watched the lights of his big car whirl and disappear down the street. Then after standing for a moment by her bed, where Mrs. Merriam now slept heavily, she softly dressed, made coffee, and toasted a slice of bread.

The hot food and drink heartened her, made the gray room less unreal.

At six o'clock she telephoned her mother, speaking very low, telling what had happened, and that Dr. Miles would be in at eight.

'Come in after the children get off to

school, will you, Mummy?' she said. Quickly sympathetic, Mother MacDonald said she would be over now, if Gwen wanted her.

'No, she is sleeping quietly now,' said Gwen. 'But I would like to talk with you when you can manage it.'

At eight Dr. Miles came in. Mrs. Merriam was still sleeping, her breath coming so lightly, so evenly, that it seemed to Gwen all must be well again. She watched the big, burly man, his impassive face, his slightly heavy, extremely gentle fingers. In the morning sun and quiet she suddenly felt that he was going to reassure her; it was probably just an attack of indigestion. Gwen told herself that she would simplify the little darling's diet henceforth.

Dr. Miles was slow to speak. It did not occur to Gwen that he was considering a method of breaking news; she thought him considering methods of treatment. She had known him all her life, but had not seen him intimately save during the rare illnesses of the healthy MacDonald brood.

Finally, he spoke, in his slow way, which always had the effect of moderation, of non-excitement.

‘Mrs. Merriam is very weak, Gwendolyn. There ought to be some one with her constantly; she should not be left, day or night — for a while.’

Gwendolyn puckered her brows. ‘I suppose,’ she said slowly, ‘Mother could come over for a few hours, and perhaps I can get leave of absence for a day or two.’

Dr. Miles’s calm voice did not change, as he said, ‘I rather think it will have to be a trained nurse, if we can have one; the attacks are likely to come at any time. Can she — pay for a nurse, Gwendolyn?’

A trained nurse! Gwen’s heart sank under the weight of the sudden burden. She knew instantly that Dr. Miles would not suggest such a thing save under serious compulsion. He knew they were working people. Obviously, then, Mrs. Merriam was very ill. Obviously, the expense would have to be met; Dan’s mother should have what she needed. Even before she answered she was computing rapidly; — her own weekly income totaled no more than the salary for a nurse; the cost would have to come out of Dan’s bank account and hers.

Steadily she spoke; ‘We will get a nurse,

Doctor. I guess we can manage it for a few days.'

Dr. Miles stood with bent head, pondering. In the end he apparently had nothing to say — except, should he look up a nurse for them?

But Gwen's mind had run rapidly over the occupations of her wide acquaintance. Celie would be the person if she could get her, kind, steady Celie who had taken care of Colonel Smith's mother. To be sure, Celie was used to luxurious households, but Gwen's instinct told her that Celie was sensibly adaptable, also that she would love Mrs. Merriam.

'I will try first to get a nurse I know,' she said. 'Mother will come while I go to the office and explain, and make arrangements.'

'I will stop in and give your mother temporary instructions,' said Dr. Miles. 'Mrs. Merriam will probably sleep all day, or at least be comfortable. I will come in again at six. If you fail to get a nurse call me between one and three at my Boston office.'

Gwen watched him go, turned and went back, herself, to the bed where Mrs. Merriam slept, so lightly, so peacefully. Then she set about doing very swiftly what had to be done before she could leave the house; dressed

then for the street. Her mother came in as she finished. There was a look of resolute cheerfulness on Mrs. MacDonald's face, the look she had worn when the girls came down with scarlet fever.

But Gwen's mind was not receptive to impressions. All her forces were gathering up, within, toward swift accomplishment of a definite task. Her nature was to take the practical end of everything first, and get to work on it; her emotions were always just a little in the rear of her arrangements. Now her entire preoccupations were to get the right nurse, to manipulate her funds to best advantage, and to manage the changed household skillfully. She hardly asked herself, 'Is this for a few days only? What shall we do if it is long?' Only in some far back corner of her consciousness did the thought stir, 'Does the doctor mean she can't live?'

As a matter of fact, Dr. Miles had said to Gwen's mother, 'They are very uncertain, these cases. She may drop off at any minute. On the other hand, she may conceivably recover and be fairly well again for a short time. At all events, we cannot let her suffer. A good nurse can do about all I can do, and quicker. Of course, the question of expense?'

‘Her son left her some savings; he is in France, you know,’ said Gwen’s mother. ‘I hope there is enough.’

Dr. Miles nodded gravely to the implied anxiety. ‘Let us see how it goes for a few days,’ he said.

In his mind he said, ‘A few days is all there will be.’ For under his fingers the little pulse had whispered to his long experience, ‘I can beat no more, I am almost gone, almost gone.’ And from his so casual-seeming examination he had learned, irrefutably, that the human machinery of the little suffering creature was quite worn out; it was like the organism of an old woman; no mending would avail, here.

CHAPTER XI

AN entirely changed life began in the little apartment, and in twenty-four hours it seemed to Gwen as if she had always been living so. Mrs. Merriam and Celie were in Mrs. Merriam's room, the living-room couch having been put in for Celie. In that room a battle was waged; from the first a battle to the death. There was no respite. A few hours of weak but smiling peace, of gentle effort to please those about her, to understand Celie's presence, tactfully introduced by Gwen as a nurse-friend who had beneficently offered to stay and help them till this 'grippe' should be over — then inevitably the gathering of the symptoms of attack. The pain mounted, mounted; the fluttering pulse grew weaker, weaker. Celie's experienced hands soothed and rubbed; she applied all the alleviating, simple remedies good nurses add to the austere ultimate ones. Sometimes they escaped the enemy without firing the big gun of the hypodermic; escaped utterly exhausted from the struggle. More often this final ally had to be summoned. Then there were the hours

of drugged oblivion, so pitiful to the watcher.

As the days passed, Gwen and her mother had to take turns at night duty, as even Celie's hardy muscles and nerves weakened under the strain. The 'few days' were over. A fortnight of the incredible nightmare recurrence of dying and recovering went by. Gwen was thin, pale, dark under the eyes. Mrs. MacDonald had settled into the wonderful endurance of mature health. Celie was taking on a grim line of jaw and chin. And the little mother, Dan's mother, seemed turning into an angel, before their eyes. She lived only to love, to whisper thanks and appreciation, to control her sufferings lest they make others suffer. After hours of agony, in a brief respite she would whisper a little joke to Gwendolyn, or put up a whimsical eyebrow at the doctor, as if to say, 'Is not this absurd?'

Mercifully, she did not worry about money. She had accepted Gwen's first explanation of Celie's presence, and though her mind, when free of the morphia, seemed clear to the watchers, it was a fact that she had lost all conception of time. She thought, vaguely, that kind Celie had been with her a day or two. This Gwen came to understand, after a time, and it was the greatest relief to her.

There were not too many relieving aspects of life by the drawing-on of Christmas. Not a word from Dan. Mrs. Merriam hanging to life by the thread of Celie's devoted skill. And expense, expense on every side. Gwen was no longer making any effort to keep up her own savings. Every cent of her salary went into the household. But for all that, Dan's bank account had to be drawn on week by week. Gwen began to be haunted by the realization that her own bodily strength might soon be the sole prop of the threatened roof-tree.

Worse than this specter of the anxious grief for Dan's mother, was the insistent question in her own consciousness, 'Why don't we hear from Dan? What has happened? Where is he?' The silence became ominous, racking to heart and nerves.

A few days before Christmas Gwen began to notice a change in Mrs. Merriam, whether for improvement, or the opposite, she could not determine. During the hours when the invalid was comparatively comfortable Celie always lifted her into a nest of pillows in a big chair, where she lay rather than sat, smiling much and looking at the sunny window. About the twentieth of December Gwen first

realized that the little smiling face had changed greatly in expression. It was somber now, indifferent, brooding. Nearly always when Gwen came in Mrs. Merriam had dropped into a nap, in her pillows. When she awoke no smile greeted the girl. Her replies were brief, almost hostile. Her eyes were fixed on vacancy.

At first Gwen was hurt, then encouraged, remembering the old sayings about the perverse temper of convalescence. But gradually something uncanny began to make itself felt in the atmosphere.

Gwen took Celie into her confidence. 'Does she seem to you just exactly herself, Celie?' she said, one day. 'There is something queer about her; what do you suppose she is thinking about?'

'Oh,' said Celie, evasively, 'weakness takes odd forms. She is tired out.'

On Christmas Eve Gwen sent Celie home to her family celebration and sat by Mrs. Merriam, herself. Celie, in turn, was to set Gwen free for Christmas morning and the home dinner.

Mrs. Merriam slept, comfortably, during the early evening. Later she moved and moaned from time to time, waking sometimes

with a start from some unpleasant dream. Gwen was rather disturbed by midnight, when Celie came, rosy and redolent of Christmas greens.

But Celie reassured her, after taking the pulse and watching the sleeper for a few minutes. So after a few girlish exchanges Gwen went to bed in her room, and Celie in her cot by the invalid's side.

When Gwen awoke, this time, she found her feet already landing on the floor, and heard her own voice answering some desperate summons. It was graying toward dawn. From Celie's room a sharp, clear demand was repeated, 'Gwen, come, please!'

Gwen sped across the living-room in night-gown and bare feet, and opened the door.

Celie was up, struggling with a little, bent, fighting figure that kept its feet by a miracle, and that pushed away her helping hands with incredible strength. Celie was trying with one hand to pull a wrap about her patient; the other arm held and supported the poor little body. Her soothing voice and all her strength were bent on getting the sick-woman on to the bed and under cover. But strong as she was, she was getting the worst of it. She was being pushed toward the door.

‘Let me! Let me go, I say!’ Mrs. Merriam was saying. The voice was deep, powerful, tragic, a voice which Gwen had never heard before. At the opening of the door Mrs. Merriam turned her head, and Gwen saw her face. Such horror and pity swept over Gwen as she had never dreamed of. The face was a mask of rage, the desperate rage born of unbearable terror. It was not, in any line, Mrs. Merriam’s face. It was the face of a soul in the grip of some overwhelming, hideous fear that aroused a very madness of determination to escape.

In the flash of seeing, it was as if Gwen had always understood. Strength of soul and body rose instantly to meet the need.

She came quietly to Celie’s aid, putting both arms about the struggling figure, so that Celie could pull the wrap together.

But even as her arms touched Mrs. Merriam she was aware of a chill of fear; in the back of her mind a phrase repeated itself, ‘maniacal strength.’ It was incredible. The little, frail hands and arms felt like bars and claws of steel. The eyes turned on her burned like coals.

‘Who are you?’ cried the harsh voice. ‘How dare you keep me here?’ Then, with

a sudden, most pitiable break in the iron tone, 'I want to go home! I *will* go home!'

'You *are* at home, dear,' said Gwen gently, pitifully. 'Won't you lie down for me, now? You will catch cold, up like this.'

'No, I won't lie down. She shall not make me. I want to go home, to my own house.' Oh, the terror in the strained voice!

'This is your house, dear,' said Gwen, as she spoke, aiding Celie's efforts to fasten the wrap. 'You have been sick, you know, and things look queer to you. But it is all right.'

'Who are you? What are you doing here?' repeated Mrs. Merriam, menacingly. 'Go away, I tell you!'

Gwen and Celie by this time had yielded ground until the pathetic group was well out in the room. The two girls looked at each other wildly. Then Gwen had an inspiration.

'Come, dear,' she said, 'lean on us, and show us where you want to go. You shall go just where you like.'

The hostility went out of the clenching hands. The little figure pressed forward so fast that both girls had hard work to keep it from plunging to a fall. Supported on their arms, the sick woman passed into the living-

room. She looked about blindly. Gwen hastily pressed the light switch.

‘Do you want to stay here on the couch?’ she said. ‘Celie will wrap you up warm, and I will make you a nice fire.’

‘No, no,’ sharply. ‘I want to go *home*, I tell you. To my own room. I won’t stay here.’

They crossed the room to Gwen’s door. Mrs. Merriam peered in, strangely.

‘Will you stay, dear?’ said Gwen. ‘This is a nice bed.’

Mrs. Merriam looked about her, uncertainly. Her face began to relax into more natural lines. ‘This is better,’ she said, vaguely. ‘Yes, I will go to bed.’

The girls lifted her into Gwen’s bed. For a time she turned and muttered, clenching and unclenching her hands. But after what seemed hours to the watching girls, she finally sank into sleep again. At a sign from Celie Gwen got the electric pad and attached it. Then, with a glance of mutual understanding, Celie moved quietly across the living-room to the telephone while Gwen remained on guard.

The two girls looked at each other. For the first time they realized how shaken they were.

‘Was it the morphia, Celie?’ said Gwen.

‘I don’t just know,’ said Celie. Her eyes were very sober.

It was, indeed, a terribly sober Christmas, so begun. And the week that followed drained their common life of all but courage.

The days and nights became a confused succession of unreal-seeming experiences, each more painful than the last, and each crowding the other so that in after years Gwen could never remember the sequence of that illness. Delirium, insanity, collapse? Dr. Miles never gave it a name. The fact was that an absolute stranger seemed dwelling in the semblance of their beloved little patient. And while her sudden attacks of terror, or rebellion, of suspicion, utterly exhausted the two girls, Mrs. Merriam seemed actually to gain bodily. She ate what they prepared for her, and submitted to most of their ministrations, but she knew neither of them. They were to her unaccountable; — strange jailers who had somehow gained power to hold her in a hated spot. She complained in low, intense tones of the horrible, falling walls in ‘this place’; of queer people who insisted in coming to the bed and talking to her. Sometimes Gwen felt her own sanity threatened. She had to take a

grip on herself to keep from looking furtively about for those unseen queer people.

Gradually, as the expense and the strain mounted, her weary mind began to concentrate on a new and all-absorbing theme. *If Mrs. Merriam should live, but insane*, what should they do? How to take care of her?

Money, money, they must have money!

CHAPTER XII

As Gwen turned and twisted the money problem in her tired mind, the almost forgotten thought of the book came back. A quickly swelling mood of relief followed the thought. She knew the first statement would not come to her till July. But if there had been a reasonably good start, Stropers would at least give the cheery news, and perhaps, at need, advance a little money!

If only she could have consulted Mrs. Smith! But Mrs. Smith was in Washington for more than a fortnight, and at Christmas Colonel Smith had followed, on the same business.

Gwen made up her mind to call on Howard Besley. She telephoned Stropers that afternoon.

The pleasant voice at Stropers' telephone desk said, 'Mr. Besley? No, he is not here. What can I do for you?'

'I think I will wait,' said Gwen. 'Will he be in again this afternoon?'

'Mr. Besley is in England,' said the pleas-

ant voice. 'He sailed just before Christmas.'

'Oh! oh, yes,' said Gwen, flatly. She continued to hold the instrument.

Then her business training reasserted itself. She explained quietly, 'I wanted to ask Mr. Besley something about a recently published book. Could you tell me who is carrying on his work during his absence? His secretary, perhaps?'

'No,' the voice said, cheerfully, 'Miss Downs is out with a sore throat. Perhaps Mr. Dearborn or Mr. Cottrell would do?'

With a sinking feeling that made everything under her tidy blouse seem hollow, Gwen made an appointment to call on Mr. Cottrell in half an hour. Mr. Dearborn, it appeared, was also away for a few days.

Her hands shook in spite of her, as she waited for Mr. Cottrell in an outer office. Then she looked up, and a chill depression succeeded to the trembling.

Mr. Cottrell was an inheritance to Stropers from an earlier administration. He was useful in his quiet corner, where he nibbled mouse-like at dry, hard crusts of information no one else had patience to digest. But he was not usually seen out of his corner.

One look at this small precise figure, the

small dry face, the small dry hands, showed Gwen that she could hope for nothing alive from this man. He was a museum piece.

The interview was weary work. With all the old-fashioned circumlocutions of speech, Mr. Cottrell had the old-fashioned evasions of thought, especially in dealing with a lady, and most especially with a lady author. It was his way to clothe the sacred functions of publishing in a grandiloquent cloak of vague expressions and large words.

It took all Gwen's courage and persistent directness to get a definite impression. But when she got it she stood up, very pale, and took courteous leave. Much as one withdraws from a funeral she walked carefully out of Stropers. Nausea rose in her. She thought, dully, 'I will go and get tea somewhere.'

Soon she realized that she was trembling all over; that she could hardly stand. Then, quite dreadfully, that she was going to cry! To herself she said grimly, 'not here on the street! Wait, hold on. Wait till you are in the office.'

Somehow she did hold on, till the door of her office snapped behind her. Mercifully, the closing hour had just passed, there was no one in the outer office. To the hall man she

had murmured, 'I shall probably be late to-night. I have a little writing to do.'

At last she was alone. Alone with the realization that Stropers had practically abandoned 'The Magic Flute,' when the Armistice was announced; that they had not pushed the first small edition, or issued a second; that the world had turned in a stupendous reaction from all that concerned war, and that war books were automatically retired by the change of public interest.

This was what the Mouse had finally conveyed to her, almost, as it were, against his will that she should understand anything he said; with indeed, a certain irritation and wounded pride that a lady should so press him for direct personal information!

Unfortunately, Mr. Cottrell had not conveyed to her that her own downrightness had led him into reducing his generalizations to this specific statement, rather than admit his ignorance in the particular instance. When Gwen left, he suffered certain mousey qualms of conscience, which he soothed finally by a little chat with Willie, his very handsome nephew, who was learning the business by way of an assistant clerkship in the mail book-room.

“ ‘ Magic Flute ’ ? ” said Willie, in response to Mr. Cottrell’s carefully vague and indirect allusion. ‘ No call for it, at all. Positively a dead one. . . . I say, have you heard what the Chief said to Tompkins? ’

After Cottrell had left, Willie’s facile mind returned to the question for a very brief moment. ‘ That was the book old what’s-his-name wrote on the instruments of the modern orchestra. Magic — master — was it ‘ flutes ’ ? Yes, that was it. ’

Gwen, alone with the cumulative disappointments, fears, and griefs of the winter, gave way as gloriously and thoroughly as she had held on. The flood gates were opened and the stream of despairing grief poured out.

It was evening when once more composed she left the shelter of the office. She went at once to a small all-night eating place much frequented by working folk of irregular hours, and ordered hot food. When she reached home most of the traces of the débâcle had disappeared from her face and manner; Gwen had adjusted her shoulders to the heavier burden of a load unlightened by dream hopes. Celie saw something, doubtless, but Celie had already grasped enough of the circumstances not to wonder at any signs of anxious thought.

CHAPTER XIII

ON New Year's Eve Gwen went to the midnight watch service at near-by Trinity Church. Celie had no wish to go, but encouraged the younger girl to follow her bent. In the dim golden light of the tapers and fragrance of Christmas greens, the hymns comforted Gwen's sore heart. For his ten-minute talk, the rector, a man of austere devoted life and simple faith, had chosen an unusual theme. In place of the expected review of past errors and the urging of future betterment, he spoke with intense feeling of the power of prayer.

Gwen listened hungrily, her heart so familiar with praying, since Dan went away.

'My friends, do not be afraid to pray for what you need in this New Year,' the rector was saying, 'do not think there is any good thing too good for the Father to give you. There is no blessing He does not long to bestow upon you. Wisdom, power, healing — ask what you will of Him who loves you. *And believe you have received it.* Listen to these marvelous words from the Gospel of

St. Mark. "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."'

'Is not that a promise? Then I say to you, go out into the New Year, having prayed for strength to do His will, and believe that strength is yours. Go out into the New Year asking for the greatest good your soul yearns for, and believe you have received it! For heaven and earth shall pass away, but His word shall not pass away. My friends, let us kneel in silent, *believing* prayer, while the old year passes.'

The congregation, subdued to his high mood, sank to its knees. There was almost unbroken silence.

Gwen's heart emptied itself of fears and hopes. A weary peace enveloped her. She tried in vain to focus her mind on a definite petition; it was as if her emptied heart held itself to the Divine Goodness like a cup, ready for filling. She was conscious of a boundless love and pity for all suffering, of a yearning to trust, but of no particular prayer. Then, haltingly, words formed in her consciousness; 'We need help, Father, Dan and Dan's mother and I. I see no way out. Lead us, lead us, on the path out!'

Musically, solemnly, the tower clock struck the first of its twelve strokes. It was midnight. The slow regular chiming achieved the twelve, and ceased. Dr. Loring's blessing marked the close of the service.

Gwen walked home in the midst of merry groups, parting from acquaintances only at her own door. An exaltation held her now. She was no longer weary, but rested, and full of hopeful thoughts. One of the strong sustaining hours of faith which all religious people know, was hers.

When she had put away coat and hat, she stepped softly into the sick room. Celie stirred on her cot, and murmured, 'Everything all right. She is asleep.' Then slept again, herself.

Gwen sat down in the chair at the bedside. She looked long at the little worn face, troubled even in its heavy slumber. And as she looked, she knew what she had to pray for. *Release!* Release for Dan's mother from whatever was holding her in torment. Release from fear and darkness to peace and light.

Gwen's arm fell protectingly, lightly across the shrunken figure. Her eyes caressed the distorted face. Something unfamiliar and militant rose momentarily within her. 'You

shall not be afraid any more,' she said, silently. 'You shall not be tormented, Dan's little, little mother.' Then her head bowed, her eyes closed, and she prayed from her soul to the soul of the Universe.

CHAPTER XIV

NEW YEAR'S morning stole into Boston in a gray cloak, with a wistful light on her brow. But by the time Gwen awoke, the great visitor wore a face of sunshine. The air glistened under a fast clearing sky.

Celie came in, with a cautious murmur. 'I did not wake you because Mrs. Merriam is having such a good sleep. Put your wrapper on and perhaps we can get our breakfast before she wakes.'

'Happy New Year, Celie,' answered Gwen, softly. 'I will come right away.'

They ate breakfast, dusted, did the dishes, and still Mrs. Merriam slept, quietly.

Finally, at ten o'clock, Gwen took Celie's place, and Celie went out for a brief walk. Gwen moved about softly, tidying here and there. Mrs. Merriam stirred. Gwen stood still, composing herself with a conscious act of will; these awakenings were beginnings of an ever-varying round of miseries.

Mrs. Merriam opened her eyes. They met Gwen's blankly. Then a light sprang to them; a pleased smile flashed to the fragile face.

‘Why, it is Gwen!’ Mrs. Merriam cried loudly. ‘You dearest child, when did you come?’

There was a pause of a heart-beat, while Gwen braced herself to the new shock of joy. Then she answered, quietly, but in key with the sick woman’s happy tone, ‘I have not been far, dear. I am going to stay now.’

‘Oh, I *am* glad!’ Mrs. Merriam’s face flushed. ‘You dear, dear child.’

Gwen went over to the bed and caressed the little hands. With an effort she kept tears from her own eyes.

‘Are you hungry?’ she said presently. ‘I have such a nice breakfast for you.’

‘Yes, dear, yes,’ said Mrs. Merriam putting one of her soft hands to Gwen’s cheek with a touch like that of a rose petal. ‘Of course I want breakfast. Oh, I am *so* glad you have come!’

Her eyes met Gwen’s with a childlike appeal of love and welcome.

Gwen swallowed; then she kissed the caressing hands and laid them down. She bathed Mrs. Merriam’s face and hands, saying little tender, commonplace things. She brought breakfast, and sat while Mrs. Merriam should eat.

But she soon saw that Mrs. Merriam was not eating. She drank a tiny swallow of her favorite coffee, broke a crumb of toast in her fragile fingers, then smiled and returned to her interest in Gwen. She was like a school child just home for the holiday, too happy to eat.

Gwen tried various little arts, but when Celie came in, Gwen was just setting the untouched breakfast on the kitchen table. A few words told the good news. Gwen ended, 'I cannot say her mind is perfectly clear; I do not know, of course. But she is herself again, Celie, her dear, sweet self!'

Celie went into the sick-room with Gwen. Mrs. Merriam looked at her with a slight, courteous strangeness. Then as Gwen said, 'Celie is here, dearest,' she smiled again in a relieved way.

'Celie is a good girl,' she said, nodding. 'She is very good to me.'

Gwen said, 'We are going to make New Year's dinner, darling, Celie and I. And you shall wear your new lovely wrapper to celebrate.'

'Is it New Year?' said Mrs. Merriam. A shade crossed her face. 'But where was I at Christmas?'

Celie looked a warning. Gwen spoke in a matter-of-fact tone, 'You were very sick at Christmas. So sick that you do not remember it. Do not try to, just now.'

'Was I?' said Dan's mother. 'Well, I am glad I am not sick now. Is Dan coming to-day?'

This time it was Celie who answered, covering Gwen's stricken silence.

'We have not heard yet; mails are so bad, around holiday time. Let's not count on him.'

'Ah, but I think he will get here,' said Mrs. Merriam, confidently. Then she added, with a child's arch look, 'Have you bought a *nice* dinner?'

As Gwen and Celie came and went from sick-room to kitchen, caring for the invalid and gently including her in the festival atmosphere, it became more and more clear that Dan's mother was indeed her old self again — at least in mood. There seemed to be a gap in her consciousness, swallowing up the recent past. Yet she bridged the gap, in a sense, by accepting Celie's presence. She evidently remembered being cared for. Once she startled both girls by saying in an ordinary tone, 'Who is that child? He is here again.'

Each girl felt the other stiffen to anxiety.

But Mrs. Merriam's face remained placid. And when Gwen answered quietly, 'There is no one here but Celie and me, dear. It is a sort of dream that comes from being sick,' she turned her attention to what the girls were doing, in a wholly untroubled way.

So, in a careful, subdued way, the girls grew almost gay. Mrs. Merriam followed their lead, and in her weak trailing voice she made little jokes. Particularly she pretended to be impatient for her New Year's dinner.

Celie surpassed herself in the tray she finally brought, and both girls sat down, at Mrs. Merriam's insistent pleading, to chat while she ate.

A tiny bit of each good thing was arrayed on the hot plate — just the size of a sick woman's appetite.

Mrs. Merriam explored each thing with her fork, experimenting, approving — but not eating. Celie waited patiently, then tried her skillful little modes of inducement. But at last it became apparent to both girls that the sick woman could not eat. She drank a very, very little and then she said, smiling wearily, 'That was so good! But I have had enough. Please take it away, dear.'

The girls were disappointed; even troubled.

But Mrs. Merriam, when the tray was removed, sank at once into a nap. Her face was so peaceful, so gently flushed, that Celie said, 'Perhaps the rest will do her more good than food. When she wakes I will try the broth again.'

So they ate their own dinner, in great thankfulness and weary content. If the future was blind and the past terrifying, at least the present was peaceful.

'Is Dr. Miles coming to-day, Celie?' Gwen asked, as they were finishing drying the dishes.

'I think not,' said Celie, 'but he may look in, after his dinner.'

As she spoke, the buzzer from the lower door sounded. 'There he is now,' said Gwen, 'I will open the door, Celie, my apron comes off easier ——'

In the tiny hall of their apartment she pressed the button that released the street-door catch, and after a moment opened the hall door. As she did so she dashed hastily back to the kitchen, deposited the apron, which had refused to come off promptly, and returned as hastily, to greet the doctor.

CHAPTER XV

As Gwen entered the little hall, a man climbed the last stair and stood in the open door. A tall, thin man in khaki, a pale young man with an oddly held left shoulder, and burning blue eyes. Her eyes meeting those hungry blue eyes, Gwen's cry choked in her throat; her arms went swiftly out, though her body lost the power of motion. One instant's pause, while so frozen into immobility, the soldier and the girl looked at each other. Then one stride carried him to her, one cry of '*Gwen!*' mingled with her half-sobbing '*Dan.*' And his right arm had her fast, her two well young arms clasped about him as if they could never let go again.

How long they would have clung, lost to time and the world, none can say. Gwen was first aware that Dan had raised his face from her hair, and was looking over her head. Turning in his arms she saw Celie's blank surprise in the open kitchen door.

The sight instantly brought the situation to her. Her heart contracted in an anguish

of pity;— to come home to this! Her poor Dan! She had intuitively grasped the fact of his wounded shoulder in their first contact.

But there was not a moment to lose. With both hands about his right hand, looking reassurance into his eyes, she said, low and quickly:

‘Your mother has been very ill, Dan. She is much better, but asleep. Come in here, till she wakes, and I will tell you everything.’

She drew him gently into the kitchen, and Celie disappeared, shutting the door softly behind her.

‘Mother *ill*?’ said Dan, and Gwen saw how sharp the lines of his face were in the quick shadow that fell there.

Gwen cut straight through to the heart of the matter.

‘She has been dreadfully ill, Dan,’ she said. ‘We’ve had to have a nurse; that was Celie you saw. But just to-day she seems better. Dearest, she is very weak, and just a little — cloudy — in her mind. You will have to be very careful.’

‘Gwen! Is she dangerously ill?’ Dan’s incredulous, fear-smitten voice pierced Gwen.

‘I hope not, now,’ she said. ‘She has been.’

‘May I, mayn’t I — go to her?’

‘Just a minute — wait, I will see how she is.’ As she turned to the door, Gwen’s racing heart sent a heavenly flush of color and light to her face. Dan took another of those swift strides and once more they clung, in a heaven of reassuring contact. Just to be together, oh, just to be together again!

Then Gwen gently detached herself and went into Mrs. Merriam’s room, leaving both doors open. Celie was putting pillows behind the little shoulders; Mrs. Merriam was awake, slightly flushed, happy-eyed. Like a speech in some fantastic fairy pageant came her greeting to Gwen.

‘I have had a wonderful sleep, dear. Is it time for Dan yet?’

Like an automatic toy wound up to carry its part in the fantasy, Gwen promptly responded, ‘Yes, dearest, he has just come.’

Both girls started convulsively at the cry that came from the invalid’s lips. It was almost a shout, so loud, joyous, commanding:

‘Dan! Dan! Where are you?’

Before it was finished Dan was there, on his knees beside the bed, his well arm about her, his head clasped in her frail arms.

‘Well, my dear,’ she cooed, patting his

cheeks and stroking his hair. 'Well, my dear, I told them you would get here to-day. I'm so glad you've come!'

'So glad you've come'; just what she had said to Gwen! What curious, timeless absence was in her mind? Gwen breathed freely again, noting that there was no tragic over-keenness here. It was again the delight of a child in a longed-for but confidently expected comrade. It came to Gwen, then, that only the present moment was quite clear to the sick woman; her illness of body and mind had cut off the further reaches of time. They need not be anxious about shock, for everything that came seemed to her quite a matter of course. Only — why had she expected Dan? Was it, Gwen wondered briefly, that she was always expecting him, in the secret depths of her soul? Perhaps.

At all events she was perfectly happy. As Dan rose from his knees and sat, boy fashion, on her bed, his mother cuddled to him, her soft cheek against the rough khaki. She reached a hand to Gwen, 'Come too, dear child,' she said.

Gwen brought a chair before Dan could move from his mother's clasp. Celie was introduced, very quietly. They were all talk-

ing in a breathless kind of imitation of everyday talk. Gwen was physically quivering with longing to hear what was wrong with Dan's arm; to care for him; to be alone with him. Dan was dazed with so much joy and so much pain added to a weariness the depth of which the others could not guess.

Only Celie was quite clear-eyed, and not without experience that told her many things the others knew nothing of. She saw the young soldier's eyes and mouth, and the lines of his gaunt figure. And Celie slipped away. Some time later she appeared again with a tray.

'Gwen,' she said, smiling, 'I have laid out a little New Year's dinner for Mr. Merriam. If you will go out and help him eat it, I will give Mrs. Merriam a bit of this nice broth.'

They found themselves in the kitchen, the doors closed; a hot dinner was set out on the blue tray at the end of the kitchen table.

But Dan's eyes lingered not at all on the table.

'Let me look at you, darling,' he was saying. 'Hold quiet, till I see you again. Oh, Gwenny, how I have wanted you!'

His tender fingers were exploring the little curls over her ears.

‘A thousand times I have dreamed of the feel of your hair,’ he murmured.

Gwen passed her own hands clingingly over his head. ‘You are here, now, Dan,’ she said. ‘We are together, again.’

‘Together again; oh, Gwen!’

Presently Gwen drew determinedly away. ‘You really must eat, Dan,’ she said. ‘See what a good feed Celie fixed up for you.’

Dan looked. A twinkle came into his tired eyes. ‘Oh, boy!’ he said. ‘Gwen, watch me!’

Gwen sat beside him, serving him, suffering his interruptions with a fond mother’s indulgence, hovering over him shamelessly. And Dan ate, with a keenness of pleasure and an appreciation which made the moments heavenly to Gwen. Not till weeks afterward was she aware that she had noticed anything unusual in the modesty of Dan’s appetite or the long pauses in his eating. Sitting with him she was wholly lost in the amazing joy of his presence, and in the whirl of thoughts about the things she must tell, and the things she longed to ask.

At his gentle urging she sketched briefly

for him the course of his mother's illness; her own presence and the need of Celie. She made it all less serious, less tragic; indeed, it now seemed so little tragic that she half doubted the earlier reality. Then of course, she put the direct question about his shoulder; how much it was hurt, and was it being treated?

Dan reassured her, in an almost uninterested tone. It had been broken 'in two or three places; operated on in Paris; doing fine now. Be as good as new in a year or two.' He really seemed aloof from the matter of his shoulder. The sharpness of Gwen's pity and dismay was checked by his manner. She said, almost timidly,

'Was it a shrapnel wound, dear?'

'No,' said Dan. His head was slightly bent, as he spoke. He might have been studying his plate, so long the stillness lasted, after that monosyllable. But Gwen, her seeking, adoring eyes on his face, was aware of a strange contracting and distorting of the muscles of his brows and cheeks. It was over in a moment, but in the moment Gwen had looked for the second time upon a mask of horror. She asked no more. Rather, she told him of her family and her work; talked, answered,

cherished him. An hour vanished in an apparent moment. Celie came out, and unobtrusively put away a full cup of broth and an untouched plate of toast. Neither noticed what she did. But Gwen said,

‘Take the afternoon, Celie. Dan and I will be staying, anyway. Go home and get a little fun.’

Celie’s back was turned to them, as she rinsed a cup at the sink. ‘I really don’t care about going home to-day,’ she said, ‘I believe I will just take a brisk walk and go to bed early.’

‘Now, Celie, you are planning so I can go home,’ said Gwen, reproachfully.

‘Perhaps you would like to take Mr. Merriam to your house for supper,’ suggested Celie gravely.

‘You are *too* good, Celie,’ said Gwen.

Dan smiled at Celie; a slow, grave smile which made his gaunt young face singularly attractive. Celie found herself flushing with pleasure.

Her programme obtained. Dan sat by his mother’s side while Celie took her brisk walk. Gwen packed her movables quickly and quietly, and made Dan’s bed with fresh linens. She telephoned her mother the great

news, and added that Dan was coming to supper.

‘You will be home, then,’ said Mrs. MacDonald, happily. ‘I will fix a bed for you this minute. It will be good to have you under the roof again, darling.’

‘Thanks, dearest,’ said Gwen. Her excitement leaped through the quiet tone.

Mrs. Merriam slept. At five she awoke, at first a little puzzled, then delighted. She stroked Dan’s hands, his cheeks, and his hair. He half-knelt, half-sat, on a cushion Gwen brought. He was loath to lose a touch or a word of his mother’s delight. But before six she had dozed off again, and was sound asleep instantly.

Gwen told Celie, coming in fresh from the cold air, ‘I tried to get her to drink a little, but she wouldn’t. She does not seem to want anything, Celie.’

‘I will try again, later,’ said Celie.

Gwen and Dan stole out on tiptoe. And for them was the thrilling joy of the MacDonald welcome. A houseful of family and neighbors, eager hands and affectionate faces; an impromptu supper; singing around the piano. Then a fervent prayer of thanksgiving from Dr. Loring, drawn thither by rumor of Dan’s

homecoming. It was more than Dan could believe — the warmth of it, the good will of it. He was as a lost son or brother miraculously returned, to all these people. He had had no idea people would feel so, for him, act so, for him.

Only once was there a jar in the harmony. A kindly but insensitive neighbor, putting his heavy hand on Dan's well shoulder, said loudly,

‘Tell us what they did to you, my boy. How did you get that bad shoulder?’

Gwen stiffened. Involuntarily she caught her breath, and looked at Dan, to whom suddenly all eyes were drawn by the loud words.

Once more Gwen caught that fleeting strangeness in his look, more controlled now, but visible to her shrinking insight. Dan's blue eyes seemed to harden, to deepen, to burn. In the silence it was as if a chill breath from a faraway terror had crept about the room. There was an awkward pause. Then Dan passed a hand over his mouth; the mouth was pallid.

‘It was broken,’ he said, unreadily. ‘Quite a bit of earth and stuff fell on me. Not a nice story for New Year's. If you do not mind,’ with a strained smile, ‘I will tell you about

something that happened to a pal of mine, instead.'

Gwen saw his hand. It trembled; and he breathed with difficulty. Her heart swelled with pity, and with anxiety. Something had changed Dan more than she had at first seen. He was obviously suffering from some weakness of unusual degree.

Dan launched into an account of his friend's escape to the Belgian territory from a German prison. He told the tale well, with the intimate touches of one to whom it had been told at first hand. It was thrilling, and there were no horrors in it. Gwen wondered what he was omitting.

She perceived that the accident to his shoulder was something of which he could not or would not speak. Evidently some ghastly experience was attached to it. At once she resolved never to approach, or allow others to approach the question. If sometime he felt moved to tell her, good. If not, let it rest. He was no less here, and safe, that she knew not what dangers he had escaped.

It was while the good fellowship was at its height of noise that one of the younger MacDonalds heard and answered the door-bell. The visitor was Jake Steinberg, Dan's

Jewish foreman of pre-war days at the factory. He had come in sheer goodness of heart to greet Dan. And Dan's heart warmed again at the brotherliness of his old acquaintance. Gwen, too, was touched by his visit, and was very sweet to Steinberg. He would not come into the parlor, but when Dan and Gwen had joined him in the little front hall, he produced a marvelous round spice cake 'with Mrs. Steinberg's compliments and best wishes.' And he lingered long enough to say, 'Ve can fix you up at the shop, Dan, any day you vant to come round. Not your old chob, I am sorry to say, but somding for a start.' Then his shrewd, kindly eyes caught the sag of Dan's shoulder, and he made a curious gesture of question with head and hand.

'No good for a while, yet,' Dan answered, smiling slightly.

'Too bad! Too bad!' Steinberg clucked. 'Vell, I tell you vat ve do, Dannie, my poy, ve find a light chop till she get well, ya?'

'That's mighty kind of you, Mr. Steinberg,' said Dan. 'I'll say you are a good friend, all right. But the fact is, I think I will take a little time to get on my feet — look around, maybe — I' (he glanced around at the door Gwen had closed behind her in carrying the

cake to be praised) 'I got quite a smart mouthful of gas when I was smashed, and the doctors over there told me to lie by a bit.'

'Tut, tut,' Steinberg's ugly face was soft with sympathy.

'Vell,' he said after a pause, 'vell, you got home now, and I guess you get some rest now, vat? Und any time you vant to come back you gif me a call, yes? Call Jake, see?'

Dan stood in the door, watching the ungainly figure amble down the street, and his heart went out to the great heart of comradeship in that common body.

'What a Christian he is; the old Jew!' thought Dan, involuntarily. And smiled, quizzically, at the instant realization that Steinberg would have been mortally offended by the thought could he have heard it.

Twice during the evening Dan and Gwen slipped over to the other house to see if all was well. Celie had not gone to bed, and she had both times the same news for them. 'She is sleeping.'

Dan went and stood by his mother a few minutes. It eased his vague fears to see her so peacefully asleep. She breathed so regu-

larly, so strongly, that she seemed less weak than in waking hours.

At eleven Gwen insisted that he go home to bed. She had, by now, some inkling of the infinite weariness of his recent journeyings. And she was beginning to sense something amiss with his health beyond the injured shoulder. It was with a sobered joy that she mounted the stairs to her own room, after the long rapt good-night for which a considerate family manipulated solitude.

CHAPTER XVI

DAN did not go to bed so promptly as he was bidden. A raging excitement was mounting in his veins. In the cold clear New Year's night, moon-flooded, he began to walk, aimlessly, but rapidly. To be at home again, to be out of the Army, *to be free*, had been the one dominating subconscious thought of his waking and sleeping hours. In the content of that one thought were all the implications of freedom: Gwen, and marriage; his mother, and all he hoped to do for her; and again, overmastering in its urge, the determination to find a real job, a life work into which he could put himself.

In the fugitive hours of complete consciousness in the hospitals and the long quiet hours on shipboard he had reckoned with the physical disabilities he knew; and deeply he had thanked his fate for the savings of his austere boyhood. With these savings he could support his mother on some light part-time job till his health came back. After that would come the finding of real work — and Gwen!

Now he *was* at home again, and free.

To-morrow he would dig out his old civilian suit, and discard the khaki forever; with how much satisfaction, ah, how much satisfaction! And Gwen loved him still. That she loved him indeed far more intensely than when he went away he had seen and felt. Her love had grown with a deepening experience, as had his own. His happiness mounted exultantly in his veins. Mounted in spite of his grief for his mother's illness — mounted in spite of a sub-current of anxious thought about expenses. To-morrow he would go into all that. To-night was for happiness! Happiness, and freedom!

Dan stretched his well arm, raised his face to the midnight sky, and laughed aloud. Oh, the glory of it! To be walking where you would, when you would; to go home when you liked, and lie in your own bed! His own man, again!

He strode on and on, unconscious for the time of weakness or trouble.

Over the hill toward the car barns, a late trolley car grumbled along. Suddenly the heavy wires snapped and sang, and an intense flare of blue-white light glared momentarily in the night sky.

Only a trolley flash.

But Dan stopped dead in his tracks. Even in the instant that his mind told him what harmless light this was, his muscles were shaking, sweat was starting on his suddenly cold body, and then his stomach seemed to rise bodily in him. God, these nerves!

A long moment he stood, holding to the fence he found himself near, waiting for the waves of nausea to subside, and the quivering to still. He battled silently with the intrusive visions automatically raised by the associated sight of the flare of light. Then, weakly, doggedly, he retraced his steps, and entering the house, sought his room.

Gradually the peace and protection of the little room soothed him. The familiar furniture, the kindly associations, drove away the nightmare memories. It occurred to him he could make himself a hot drink in the kitchen, where he had often fooled with cooking in the old days.

Celie was in the kitchen, in wrapper and slippers. He did not notice what she was doing. She said in the subdued sick-room tone, but smiling, 'Hungry?'

Dan replied, as softly.

'No, but I've got a kind of mean stomach since I was gassed. It gets sick; with nerves

I guess. I was thinking I would make a hot drink to sleep on.'

Celie looked at him gravely, and friendlily.

'I thought you might have been gassed,' she said. 'I'm sorry.'

'Thanks. But do not say anything to Gwen or Mother,' said Dan, hurriedly. 'It will be all right soon, now that I am home.'

Celie turned and opened the bread box.

'Suppose you try hot milk and a slice of brown toast,' she said, practically. And in a very few minutes she had the hot, well-toasted slice ready, while Dan brought a cup of milk to scalding heat over the gas.

He ate and drank, and the nausea went. Then Celie said a kind 'Good-night; sleep well.'

'Will it wake Mother if I run the water in the bathroom?' Dan's stage whisper followed Celie out of the kitchen.

Celie smiled sympathetically.

'No, indeed,' she said.

So Dan took a long, luxurious, hot bath, in the neat little bathroom, swashing to his heart's content in hot water and clean-smelling soap. He had almost forgotten how exquisite the comforts of daily life could be.

Deliberately he washed his mind of army thoughts and habits, as he soaked his skin and his hair free from army smells.

When he got into his bed, at two o'clock, he was relaxed, drowsy at last. But even then he did not sleep at once. The joy of being there was too great to forget. So as he had so often done in his devout boyhood, the returned wanderer said a little prayer, lying in the early-morning darkness in his boyhood's bed. 'Thanks, God, for bringing me home. Bless my mother. Bless Gwen. Help me get well.' Then he slept, deeply and long.

When Dan awoke his room was quiet in the full sun of midmorning. He lay for a while unmoving, steeping his senses in the realization of home and freedom, and in sheer enjoyment of the beautiful usualness of everything about him. Then he addressed himself to the familiar morning task of easing his night-stiffened shoulder into the power of motion. His lips tightened grimly as he turned gingerly and began moving his hand and arm gently, tentatively. The long hot bath had helped. He felt less like an out-of-order mechanical toy than usual. After a time the pain eased, and he was ready to greet this longed-for first day at home.

It was then that he saw a little folded note where Celie had soundlessly laid it on his table, earlier in the morning. He reached it from the bed, and unfolded it eagerly. Gwen's beautiful firm handwriting said,

DEAREST:

A happy day to you. I hope our little Mother Merriam and you will have a wonderful time together. But do not wholly forget

Your GWEN

P.S. I shall try to get the 5:10 car.

Dan passed the note slowly over his smiling lips and lay down again with both hands holding the bit of paper to his breast. Floods of tenderness went over him. His Gwen!

Presently he roused himself to think how his mother had passed the night. Gwen had told him that all his clothes were packed into the window-seat chest he had made for himself long ago. He hunted out first the comfortable old dressing gown for which he had so often longed in the hospital. His thin frame thus modestly garbed, he stole softly out to reconnoiter.

As he stepped into the living-room he heard the sound of snoring from the open door of his mother's room. It surprised him. The thought flashed to his mind, 'I did not know mother snored. She never did, in the old days.' And on the heels of that thought came the other, 'It sounds like a drugged sleep. I do hope she has not had a bad night.'

Celie had heard him. She came out, rather pale, Dan noticed, but with the pleasant look that was Celie's usual substitute for a smile.

'Isn't mother sleeping very heavily?' said Dan, uneasily. 'Did you have to give her something?'

'No,' said Celie, 'she has been sleeping like that all night.'

Dan went softly in, and stood by the bed. His mother was indeed sleeping heavily. He would have felt alarmed but for the fact that Celie showed no uneasiness.

'Is it — all right?' he asked, after a moment.

Celie busied herself about the bed covers. 'Her pulse is really pretty good,' she said. 'Of course, she has not taken much nourishment. Still — Dr. Miles will be in before long. We will see what he says.'

Dan went away to dress, vaguely troubled.

The light-hearted hour of his awakening dropped back into oblivion. Yet, it was probably all right, he reflected, else Celie would be doing something.

Celie looked after him a moment, then resumed her vigil. Her schooled face told nothing, but her mind was busy with many thoughts, of many kinds.

When he came back, oddly square shouldered and gaunt in his old civilian suit, she left him in her place while she went to prepare breakfast for him. Dan protested his ability to fend for himself, but she countered, sincerely, that it would rest her to move about.

‘Just speak if your mother stirs,’ she added, with a casual effect. ‘I will hear you.’

Dan remained, brooding over his mother’s unconscious face. She was so lost in sleep that the firm sweetness of her controlled mouth had relaxed into a slight openness, a little ghastly, truth to tell. The heavy raucous breaths puffed her underlip out and in. But the upper face was very peaceful, closed lids drooped above cheeks not wholly colorless.

‘I guess older people do look a bit ghastly when they sleep,’ Dan admitted to himself. ‘But gee! I wish Mother would wake up, and let me start doing things for her.’

Celie fed him, comfortably, twenty minutes later, making her own light early lunch out of the same meal. Then refusing his urging that she take a turn out of doors, she suggested that he himself go out.

Dan went, finally, and walked about till the crisp air had put real heart into him. In that sun-filtered, clean atmosphere he felt a new courage, a new confidence, rising in him, and he turned back to the house with something of his old cocky stride.

Then he saw Celie in the lower door. She was waiting for him, signaling to him. But as he answered her gesture, and started to hurry, she turned and disappeared within the house.

Disturbed but scarcely alarmed, he hastened up the stairs. Celie was standing just inside the door. She waited till the door closed behind him. Then she came close and put her hands on his, grasping his larger hands tightly. 'Your mother,' she said brokenly, 'your mother — is gone.'

Dan stared at her. Her words for the moment seemed utterly meaningless, yet all the while a terrible meaning was waiting to leap at him.

‘Gone? Why — what — what —’

He stared at her stupidly. Celie’s eyes told him. His hands wrenched from hers. He put her aside. He was in the bedroom, at his mother’s bedside.

His mother’s head lay back among her pillows in a singular immobility. The parted lips were silent, the closed eyes were shadowed.

‘*Mother!*’

The word was only a whisper, but to Celie, close behind, it seemed to rend the air.

Then with an exceedingly bitter cry, Dan said, ‘Why was I not here?’

Celie’s eyes were wet.

‘I did not know,’ she said. ‘She has recovered so many times that it seemed as if she might again for a time. And if not, I thought it would be hours, perhaps days —’

Dan sank to his knees, his hands yearning over the soft gray hair, the cool remote forehead, the little unresponding hands. In the utter suddenness of his loss his only thought was for her going, alone.

‘She just stopped breathing,’ Celie said, painfully. ‘She never waked at all. I was tucking in the foot covers when I heard the heavy breaths stop. Before I even got to the

head of the bed she gave a little sigh, just a single, soft breath. And that was all.'

Dan's mouth writhed. 'Then she did not suffer; she did not know?' he said.

'She slept away,' Celie said. 'If you had been in the next room you would not have known. Do not grieve that you were out.'

Then, to his bewildered, agonized murmur of questioning, she said, quietly, 'It is a great mercy, Mr. Merriam. Your mother could not possibly live; and she might have died in great pain of body and mind. No one who knows could ask anything better for her than to fall asleep — like this.'

'Mother, Mother!' Dan whispered.

Over the little face on the pillow a subtle change was growing. None can say whence or when that change comes to the faces of the dead who 'die in the Lord.' It is not, and then — it is. The face of Dan's mother was settling into a faintly smiling expression of content beyond all earthly comparison. As Celie studied it, broodingly, the lines of mouth and forehead and eyes imperceptibly grew into a beauty which had something triumphant in it, and withal an inscrutable look as of a happy secret, held.

'She knows something we do not know,'

Celie's heart whispered. 'Never have I seen a dead face so beautiful.'

The beauty grew in the silence. Not in austere and solemn remoteness Dan's mother's earthly body was taking its farewell, but in an ineffably gentle dignity, a radiance of joy and release. The faint secret smile sealed the corners of her mouth, the brooding eyelids became carven symbols of triumphant peace.

'See,' Celie said, very softly. 'See how beautiful she is — at rest.'

But through the gasping sobs of the kneeling man came only the words, 'Mother, my mother!'

CHAPTER XVII

ON a Sunday afternoon, Dan and Gwen stood in the dismantled rooms which had been home to Dan. Gwen had turned and buried her face in her arms against the wall.

‘Please don’t, dear,’ Dan said, with a gentle weariness. ‘No one else in the world could have done for us what you did. You made my mother happy and comfortable in her last days. You made our money go three times as far as it would. You have been everything to us. Don’t, *don’t* cry, Gwen!’

‘But you have no money left, and no home! And you are not fit to work in the shop. Oh, why won’t you come to us, Dan? Why won’t you let Mother take care of you for a while?’

Dan’s face twitched. He put his arms around her, while he battled with the weakness for which her emotion was too great a strain.

‘I’m not exactly a rat, yet,’ he said. ‘Even without money a man can be a man, I hope.’

‘Oh, your pride!’ Gwen wailed. (Neither Dan nor any one else had heard Gwen use that tone before.) ‘Dearest, you are ill. Put

away your pride and let us take care of you. Afterwards you can do as you like. Pay us back, if you will. But come to us, now, Dan! Come to us!’

A wry smile twisted Dan’s haggard face. ‘Your mother naturally hasn’t enough to do, with only six to keep house for,’ he said. Then his mocking tone changed to a sternness that his face reflected. ‘Do you think I will let you support me, Gwen MacDonald? God knows how much money you spent for Mother, and God only knows when I can pay you back. But I’ll *not* live on you. Don’t ask me again.’

His arms were rigid around her body, his mouth set in granite lines; but the bitterness of his eyes was all Gwen saw. She shivered.

Presently with an effort that took all her will she schooled her face, stilled her quivering body. She even contrived a smile, of sorts.

‘Very well, dear,’ she said. ‘I will not trouble you. But don’t turn me out, wholly, Dan. Even pride isn’t as good as love.’

Dan’s rigid clasp loosened and tightened, as a sob broke raspingly from his lips.

‘Don’t think I don’t know, Gwen,’ he gave way. ‘Don’t think I am ungrateful. I couldn’t

bear that, from you! You are all I have, all I am, beloved. All I have — —'

Long she stood in his arms, comforting him, comforting herself. Then lingeringly, they closed behind them the door of that empty house, never again to be tenanted by hopes or fears of theirs.

Dan had secured a room in a working-man's boarding house which was not too far from the factory by trolley. Life there was not an alluring prospect; Gwen had fought against this move until she despaired of finding a substitute within Dan's means. Both hoped it would be only a brief experience, for good old Steinberg had said, 'Chust so soon as somding better come, you get it, my poy.'

Dan, in the new pressure of need, had been glad to accept temporary work at eighteen dollars a week in the shop. Gone now was any immediate prospect of a quiet convalescence; gone, his hope of changing to congenial work.

But what must be, must be. Dan bent his head to the yoke as he had done on the long ago day of his father's funeral, when he knew that he must leave school.

A fortnight later, in his second week at

the shop, Dan swung onto a loaded car and stood jammed in the reeking human mass of home-going labor. As the car lurched and ground around the corner under the elevated, the wet rails emitted a sharp, prolonged scream. It pierced the ear like a knife. Dan set his teeth. In his throbbing consciousness he said persistently to himself, 'It will stop; it will stop. Don't listen.'

Overhead a train crashed and roared on its way. Thunderous, overwhelming noise engulfed the puny surface car and its burden of workers. The sweat started on Dan's pallid forehead. Hidden in his pockets, his hands clenched desperately.

Smells assailed him — — wet cloth, unwashed humanity, out-breathed air. Nausea, the ever-haunting misery of the gas sufferer, began to creep upon him. The breathless fear of faintness clutched him. His head ached, dully.

So the journey progressed, the daily Via Dolorosa. Everything hurt him; the jolting, the bad air, the dizzying motion. But more than all else together, the noise! Like a fiendishly clever enemy, noises hammered at his brain and beat at his shrinking stomach; taunted his nerves, maddened his thoughts.

When his corner was reached, Dan was trembling so that he stumbled in getting off the car. Like a prayer his thoughts went up, 'Thank Heaven, that is over, again!' But beneath the thought ran a mocking subconscious refrain, 'Till to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow.'

He walked slowly to the hotel, thankful for the fresh air, but shivering uncontrollably.

As he entered the hall and started up the stairs to his room, the characteristic stale smell of onion-pervaded cooking smote his nostrils. Dan's stomach jerked resentfully at the conglomerate odor. His hunger gave place to renewed distaste.

He lay down on his lumpy bed for a few minutes after washing. Only a few minutes, for the food at the Reynolds improved neither in quantity nor quality after the first stroke of the dinner gong.

So he went into the dining-room, greeted his table mates with a pleasant word as occasion offered, and partook of watery soup in which a bit of tomato floated wistfully. Lamb stew followed. Dan's mother had been wont to make a lamb stew which was a dish fit to set before a king. It was not, however, in any strain related to the dish set before Dan.

Gristle and grease and bits of avenging bone lay in wait for the partaker of that dish, well hidden by the viscous fluid in which they lukewarmly reposed.

Boiled onions were the vegetable of the evening meal. One more hour of cooking, a generous dredge of butter, pepper, salt, and they would have been friendly onions, good onions. As it was they were sullen, solid onions, hostile to taste and to digestion! Dan knew how they would burn and resent being eaten, when once they got within. But — — he was fairly empty. He ate one, grimly.

Dessert was the daily alleviation. Mary in the kitchen could make a pie. Not a glorified pie, but a not-too-bad pie for a hungry man. And there was coffee. Pie and coffee to take away the taste of grease and onion. Dan was grateful.

He did not go into the front room where knots of men lounged awkwardly, in the rear of a solid row of chairs facing the street windows. This front orchestra row of seats was already occupied by critical observers of the passing show. Some one had put a nickel in the slot of the mechanical piano and it was grinding out jazz of an exaggerated type. Dan shut his bedroom door against the syncopated

intrusion, and lay down again on the inhospitable mattress. He began to cough persistently, from the stuffiness of his ill-cared-for room. Presently he opened the window. Instantly a blast of street noise assailed his ears. Dan said, 'Oh, damn,' softly, wearily, and bent his energies to endurance.

For Dan was having a very hard time of it, a very hard time indeed. The slight impetus toward improved health given him by the sea voyage had long since failed, and now each day sapped his strength and increased the tortures of his over-sensitized nerves. Growing with his weariness, with his daily tribute of reserve strength to the strain of the miserable daily task, fear dwelt with him; the fear of finding himself unable to work, a burden on charity. That vision was to his temperament and habit of life the one ultimate horror; the unendurable.

February opened with a mad rush of wind and rising temperature, followed by days of driving rain. The snow turned to lakes of slush, the wet wind and sleet soaked everything and everybody. All the frozen dirt of the factory district dissolved into liquid disagreeableness. Germs of human wretched-

ness filtered into body and soul. The 'flu' became horribly prevalent.

One evening in early February Dan staggered to his room shivering and sneezing. By morning he was raging with fever, and his body was racked with pain. It seemed to him, lucid of mind that first moment, that it was the end. Such fever and pain as he was enduring must burn out the strength that he felt to be already drained to its ebb.

For a little he fought against the thought. He remembered that he was young, that Gwen loved him. Then all thoughts and feelings became uncertain, tricky, blending with wild imaginings and memories. Presently he drifted into a phantasmagoria of the unreal, from which he emerged at intervals to realize briefly that he must have medical care. In one such brief interval he got the kindly slattern chambermaid to telephone Dr. Miles.

The message came to Dr. Miles so garbled by the girl's hopeless stupidity that it was after office hours in the late afternoon when he leisurely appeared at the hotel, to see who wanted him and for what.

By that time Dan was tossing and muttering on his miserable bed.

'Push, push, push,' he was muttering, over

and over. 'Oh, God, air, air!' And with the words he seemed trying to burrow into or out of his bed. His bad shoulder twitched and his hand moved as if seeking something.

Dr. Miles looked at him, felt him over, and straightened up. His lips pursed into a 'Tchu, tchu.' He stood a moment, his big body balanced on widely planted feet.

Then in his calm way he proceeded to produce rapid and active results with an effect of doing nothing in particular.

Five days later Dan emerged from the phantasmagoria, weak beyond belief, to find himself on the convalescent list at the hospital, in a small private room shared by another flu patient.

In those five days, Gwen's eyes had grown preternaturally large in the peaked pallor of her face. Mrs. MacDonald still kept her comfortable ways, but her face was lined. She had come and gone unwearingly, eking out the scant services of the overworked nurses with a tactful docility that disarmed criticism. Gwen had spent all her evenings at the hospital; would have given up her days if she had been allowed. Both women knew that the battle for life wavered toward defeat more than once. Both, too, had now some sort of

mental picture of what had happened to Dan at that time when his shoulder was broken 'in several places.'

Gwen wept and shuddered at night at the vision of a feeble, half dead human figure pushing, creeping, gradually emerging from an entombing mass of earth and débris, the whole picture shrouded in night, illumined now and then by ghastly flares of light. She remembered her Armistice night's dream of the pallid hand moving feebly from a heap of earth. Dear God, it must have been like that!

Then the visions continued, with breaks and gaps which could not be filled, now seeming lighted by daylight, now lost in dusk. There was a wild figure, its one shoulder and arm dragging unnaturally, its clothes in ribbons, its face blood-smeared, tottering drunkenly, falling and stumbling up again, trying to find its company; a lost, abandoned, broken wretch, poisoned with gas while it struggled in its living tomb — — falling, rising again — — indomitable.

At the last, rails gleaming out in a sudden flare; rails meant to the half-dead man a service track that must lead eventually back

to a base. Down that slender path of hope the swaying figure passed — — and fell, not rising again.

It must have been many hours afterward that he was gathered in. Gwen had a fairly accurate sequence now, of the first-aid surgery, inadequate indeed, the pain and delirium. Then had come the providential transfer of all patients in that base to Paris, where a great surgeon had found and set the terrible fractures. Before Dan was well enough to send a message he had been transferred to the hospital ward of one of the great homegoing ships, where in the good air and relief from strain, he had begun at last to recover.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE culminating misfortune of the influenza summoned all the remnants of battling force which remained to Dan's shattered constitution. His determination was savage, not to be gainsaid. He *would* get on his feet, would get back to work, would not run further into debt. After six days of gradual improvement from the stricken weakness of his first awakening from delirium, he tried to leave the hospital.

Dr. Miles spoke plainly to him.

'It is death, my boy,' he said, 'just that. And for Gwen's sake if no other, I will not permit it.'

Dan submitted. Ate the bread of bitterness of a week longer, chafing, worrying.

'And when,' he said to Dr. Miles, 'when am I to pay you for all this, if you won't let me work? I had just twenty dollars in the bank when you brought me here!'

Dr. Miles sat down by the bed. No nurse was in the room. 'Merriam,' he said, 'you can pay me from your compensation money when it comes, if you want to. But whether it

comes or not, I want to tell you something. I am older than I was, my boy — — pretty heavy, and not too much good, in spots. They couldn't use me in the army. I did not enjoy staying here in comfort while lads like you went to France. The only thing I took much pleasure in was finding some boy once in a while that I could do something for. Merriam, don't drudge me the privilege of giving you this little thing!

The old eyes and the young met. There was a kinship there; both were acquainted with grief. After a moment Dan's hand went out. The helpless tears of weakness rolled slowly down his face as Dr. Miles clasped the transparent hand in his firm fingers.

'All right, sir,' said Dan. 'Only I must pay it back when I can. I can't seem to live any other way.'

'That is all right,' said Dr. Miles. 'And Dan, all this I hear about your being slated as 'missing' and not being able to collect your compensation money, seems foolish to me. I am going into it myself this afternoon, with the authorities. You have no objection to my taking your papers along and seeing what I can do?'

'I shall be very glad,' said Dan gratefully.

‘It does seem as if it ought to be simple enough to prove that I am alive. But it appears that I am technically dead!’ He smiled, ruefully. Then in his weak, hoarse voice, with pauses for the difficult breath, he went on, ‘Apparently my company was withdrawn after the attack when I got — — hurt — — and the stretcher-bearers brought in some fellows who saw me just before that shell burst. So my name went on the missing list. It never got corrected. Things were in an awful jumble after the Armistice, and I was out of my head and no help to anybody. So there you are — —’

The long statement left him breathing hard. He seemed to himself a thing of absolutely no worth to the world.

Dr. Miles went out on his mission of establishing Dan’s claim, later in the day. Went with serene confidence in the ease of it, the common sense of it. With a half-dozen prominent people ready to identify Dan as himself, and with so obvious a disability to be dealt with, there could surely be little delay.

The good doctor came from his mission bewildered, angry. He had been referred from one office to another, from Red Cross to Army and from Army to Red Cross. And the whole

net result of his efforts had been the final agreement of all parties that Daniel C. Merriam of Company —— was technically missing.

That there was going to be delay, Dr. Miles now admitted. He hoped to lessen its weary length, but he no longer wondered at what had seemed Dan's strangely apathetic attitude toward the matter. Dan had merely lost heart in the enterprise of chasing the red tape clue through its merry mazes. It had seemed to him easier to force his sick body to work, than to starve to death on the doorstep of Government relief. But like most of his comrades he was very chary of placing blame. He had come out of the War World with a weary philosophy that no one was to blame for anything.

Before February left the calendar — to Gwen's deep distress and Dr. Miles' fretted disappointment, Dan was at the shop again, where Steinberg had once more maneuvered him a job.

Gwen and her mother did all they could for him in his weakness. But as March drew out its length and merged into the coldest April of recent years, the man's morbid pride increased with his steadily decreasing vitality. It was

a struggle and a matter for tact to get him even to share a meal.

The old cheery, whimsical, comfortable Dan was gone utterly. In his place was a man obsessed by a passion of pride, pitifully cloaking a phantom of fear.

Perhaps even at the pass of weakness and constant pain where he now was, Dan's grim courage might have held until tardy Government help came, but for a small, unimportant incident, an entirely disproportionate disappointment which came to him when he could bear no more disappointments.

One twilight it occurred to him to tramp out to the old patch where he had once had his garden. A sudden hope had come to him that a return to the old gardening evenings — on such a scale as one sound arm permitted — might help his health. He knew at least it would be a happiness.

So he trudged slowly, draggingly, along, playing, in fancy, with sods and soil, till he turned the last corner, and faced down the short straggling street which had opened into the acre of his vegetable rows.

The short straggling street had extended itself into a compact double row of Government-owned workingmen's houses. The once

vacant lot was vacant no more. War had taken one more possession from Dan.

That night he did not call on Gwen. A vast, all-encompassing distaste, an overwhelming indifference of body and mind, had him. After the first sharp throb of disappointment he had burst into loud, toneless laughter, which he as suddenly checked, self-scornfully. Then he had turned back and dragged his slow, weary way home. With every step lethargy crept upon his spirit. He was tired of it all. There was nothing anywhere but an unbearable weariness. Blocked at every turn by poverty and bodily disability, he began to stop caring for life.

He crept into bed. With the morning light no influx of returning cheer or courage came to him. An indifference as supreme as it was genuine was his greeting to the day. The only thing he was conscious of caring about as he dressed, ate, and went to work, was to pay his way while it lasted. Fight to live?—no more. It was not worth while. A man got tired, eventually. But while he lived he would pay.

And presently, sometime in the working-day, a natural corollary of the thought took him to the question, ‘Afterwards?’

His thought answered instantly, 'And I'll pay, *then*, by Heaven!'

Then once more he laughed aloud, but checked the sound at the inquiring glance of his working neighbor. The sourly amusing thought that had overtaken him was, that he was far better able to pay for his funeral than for his living. He had kept up his life insurance payments through it all. Dead, he would be worth twenty-five hundred dollars. Alive, he could not command twenty-five dollars.

A thought which many men have had before Dan, and many will have, after him. But not a thought conducive to optimistic living.

When Dan finally aroused himself to go to the MacDonalds', the third evening after, Gwen greeted him with a strained and anxious sweetness which pierced his mood enough to bring a tardy apology.

'I should have telephoned you,' he said, heavily. 'I know I said I was coming Tuesday. I beg your pardon.'

Gwen's heart, wrung these many weeks with anxious thoughts, sank fathoms deep. What was in his tone, his manner, she did not yet identify. But infallibly her love knew that something was very wrong.

She caressed him with her smile and her gentle touch, tried to win him to laughter with a funny anecdote carefully saved for his coming. Tried to engage his attention to some pretty sewing she had in hand. But long before the evening waned, she was desperate. Dan was as remote, as drearily untouchable, as if miles lay between them. For a space she wondered if she had offended him. Then she began to sense the depth and unconsciousness of his apathy, and to tremble with a sick fear.

At last she laid her hands on his shoulders and lifted her face to his.

‘What is it, Dan?’ she begged. ‘What has happened? Don’t you — don’t you love me any more?’

Dan put his hands over hers; patted them. ‘Of course I love you,’ he said, with a careful gentleness which struck a chill to her heart. ‘There really isn’t anything the matter. I — I am tired, that’s all.’

His voice sank, broodingly, on the last words. He put Gwen’s hands from him, and sat down, wearily, his head hanging, his hands between his knees.

Gwen stood for a moment, hurt to the quick. Then the silent hopelessness of his attitude smote her out of all consideration of

self. 'Danny, darling,' she half sobbed, 'don't look like that! I'm here, dear. Isn't that something? And all your friends love you so. Mother and Father, Dr. Miles, even Jake loves you, Dan! And spring is coming — we'll get out into the woods, dearest, every Sunday. Oh, what is it, sweetheart? Is the pain so bad?'

'Please Gwen, don't,' said Dan, rousing himself. 'I am only tired. There is nothing ——'

Then, as her tear-dimmed gaze denied his words, he suddenly straightened and gripped hard on her quivering shoulders.

'I am not worth your suffering, Gwen,' he said hoarsely, 'I am not worth anything to anybody. The sooner I am dead the better for all concerned.'

'Dan!' cried Gwen, in an absolute horror at the uncharacteristic excess.

'Beastly thing to say, I know,' said Dan, 'but it is the plain truth.'

'Dan!' breathed Gwen, again.

'I am sorry, Gwen,' Dan went on dully, 'I don't want to hurt you, God knows I don't want to hurt you. But I can't seem to care about anything any more. Everything is so much trouble.'

His voice trailed off, and his eyes drifted from hers.

A panic of loss seized Gwen. It seemed to her that he was bodily departing from her. With a gasp, she fought against hysterical sobs. Dan brought himself back, remorsefully. His disciplined, courteous nature surmounted the indifference of his black mood, and set in motion the tenderness and soothing words which Gwen needed. But though she was comforted, Gwen knew that the comfort was a surface thing.

Dan was drifting away. She felt it, knew it. He was drifting away from love, from hope, from life itself; letting go of it all in the indifference of utter weariness. And she was helpless.

To Dan himself the apathy of weariness had now reached a stage numbing thought. He dwelt secretly on the idea of being out of it all. Quiet, at least, the dead were, not kicked at, crushed hourly, by resounding hammers and whirling wheels. For noise remained the climax of his daily sufferings. Noise and nausea; they were always with him.

One evening, toward the middle of April, he let this haunting thought of death slip out of the secret places. He was unaware that

he had betrayed it to Gwen, but Gwen caught the allusion, understood the implication. She knew, with a sinking despair in her heart, that Dan was brooding on reaching an end of his troubles. How long — how long — before he would drift from that to the idea of *making an end*? Her clear mind, her deep understanding of his condition, brought the problem straight home to her. She was, for the moment, half crazed with fear and pity.

But she literally dared not attack the problem, openly. She no longer knew what reaction might meet her efforts. Long after Dan had gone home she sat and shivered and thought, alone downstairs. She prayed, too, but her heart was so heavy, her brain so stupefied that her prayer seemed to have no wings to mount on. She went to bed at last, to sob unrestrainedly but softly, in the dark. And on the next morning she awoke with a sense of fate, of destiny, waiting for her.

CHAPTER XIX

THAT noon, Gwen met Horace Besley face to face on the Common, a few rods from Stropers' door. She was walking without wish to see any one, without interest in anything, her heart a dully aching, beaten thing, her mind a tired confusion of unhappy thoughts.

She would not have seen Besley if he had not stopped in front of her with outstretched hand. She looked up and recognized him, with indifferent perception that he looked very English and very elegant in spring attire.

'Marvelous coincidence,' said Besley, with his brilliant, brief smile. 'I was dictating a letter to you not fifteen minutes ago, and here you are! How do you do?'

'How do you do?' countered Gwen, forcing a smile.

'How does it feel to be the author of a "Best Seller"?' said Besley retaining her hand. 'I have always wanted to know. You don't look proud and haughty yet.'

Gwen's breath caught in her throat. How cruel! How incredibly thoughtless! She tried to be a good sport, standing there with his

teasing smile looking down on her. She told herself swiftly that if the downfall of an author's hopes seemed merely funny to her publisher, she would be proud enough, sport enough, to take the jest. But it was too much. It was not her sporting day. To her helpless anger, she felt the tears welling into her eyes.

With a smothered, 'Don't I? Please excuse me —— good-bye, Mr. Besley,' she tried to pass him.

Horace Besley stared at her; saw the tears and the pallor.

Gently, with a swift dropping of banter, he barred her way. His voice was both courtly and sympathetic as he said,

'Forgive me, Miss MacDonald. You are in trouble. I did not know; I have been away. I trust,' he hesitated, frowning in concentration, 'I hope you have not met with loss?'

Gwen could not remain angry, he was so gentle, so regretful, bending over her. She wiped her eyes inconspicuously. 'I did lose a dear friend this winter,' she said. 'I am a little unstrung perhaps, and your joke ——' in spite of herself her mouth quivered again, and she stopped.

'My joke?' said Besley, blankly. 'What joke?'

‘About the book,’ said Gwen shakily. ‘It — that book — meant a good deal to me.’

‘I should rather say so,’ said Besley, grinning broadly. ‘It would mean a good deal to me, if I had written it, believe me! But what did I say? Was I disrespectful or something?’

Gwen stared at him, in her turn. Her tired mind refused to make sense of his words. But before she could think of a polite answer he was speaking again.

‘Really, you know,’ he was saying, ‘in all my young life as publisher I’ve never had such a thrill as your book has given me. Sixty thousand copies in the first four months, what? I will say “some sale”.’

‘Oh, Mr. Besley, don’t mock me!’ cried Gwen, at the end of her control. ‘It isn’t a joke to me! I wanted it to be a success. We so *needed* it to be a success. It is bad enough to have it a failure without being joked about it.’

Mr. Besley looked down at her with a face over which blankness spread. Then he frowned in a puzzled way and looked again, as if he might have missed something the first time. Gwen dabbed at her eyes. One or two people passing glanced at them curiously.

Still Mr. Besley studied her in puzzled silence.

Suddenly, he exclaimed, 'Look here, are you spoofing me, or what?'

'What?' said Gwen, drearily.

'Look here,' he said again, helplessly, 'do you mean — you can't mean — you don't *know*?'

'Know what?' said Gwen. She began to feel as if she had always been standing on the Common with Horace Besley, making meaningless responses to meaningless remarks.

'Haven't you heard — haven't you seen the papers? Great Heavens, hasn't any one *told you*?' Besley was wiping his brow.

Suddenly he looked about at the loitering spectators. He seized Gwen firmly by the arm.

'Come with me,' he said, gently, but rather agitatedly. 'I must see you. Come to my office.'

Gwen went. She did not care what he wanted, whether to console her or to suggest something new. She did not care about anything, except maybe to sit down and cry.

They passed Mr. Cottrell in the anteroom. He looked suddenly embarrassed as Gwen's

eyes met his with an unintentional effect of coldness.

They were in Mr. Besley's office. At some low-spoken suggestion the secretary slipped out.

Then Horace Besley did a most amazing thing. He put his arm around Gwen's shoulders and sat her down in his big armchair. And he said, leaning forward so that his eyes looked directly into hers,

'My dear little girl, there has been some idiotic mistake, somewhere; no matter where, just now. The important thing now is that I am going to tell you something which is absolutely true; and I want you to believe me, implicitly, every word. Will you?'

'Of course,' said Gwen, with an uncertain smile. 'What is it?'

Besley's eyes glowed.

'My dear Miss MacDonald,' he said, slowly and commandingly, '*I was not joking about your book, "The Magic Flute."* I thought you knew, you should have been told. It is the biggest success of our season, and a real topnotcher! It has earned a small fortune for you already, and is on its way to earning several more.'

Gwen gasped and paled. Her eyes widened,

startingly. 'Wh—what?' she said faintly. Besley took her hands.

'All quite true,' he said smiling. 'No joke in it anywhere. We have sold sixty thousand copies in four months and shall probably sell ten times as many before the run is over. You will have something over twelve thousand dollars coming to you on your first statement.'

He was beginning to enjoy the drama of it, the race of expressions over Gwen's paling and flushing face; the incredulity, the hungry questioning, the dawn of amazed rapture. But as he rounded out his final sentence, enjoying his own climax, he interrupted himself with an exclamation, and leaped to catch Gwen.

For Gwen had fainted! Positively, genuinely, convincingly, Gwen had done what nobody ever does any more. She had fainted from too much joy.

Besley was horrified. Bitterly denouncing himself for a dramatic fool, he lifted her limp body to the couch which was customarily an empty decoration. Then he hesitated. He felt instinctively that Gwen would regret having people know all she had felt and thought. He decided to call no one for a moment.

In the moment, to his great relief, Gwen opened her eyes; stared, stirred, sat up. Then like a child she put her hands to her breast.

‘Oh, say it again,’ she said. ‘Is it true? Really true?’

‘It is true, dear child,’ said Besley, his own eyes a bit misty. ‘You are a very fortunate young lady.’

‘Oh, I am much, much more than that,’ said Gwen in a hushed voice, her wide eyes solemn with immeasurable happiness. ‘I am the happiest woman in the world! For the man I love is sick and heart-sore and in need, and here is money for him! Money, and fame — and health.’

She seemed to Besley poised on an almost visible peak of exaltation.

Once more, as he had done on the day when Gwen brought him the manuscript, Horace Besley drew the whole story from her now by tactful and sympathetic promptings. The death of Dan’s mother, his own illness and present condition, the total demolishment of their combined savings, were presently clear facts to Besley’s active mind. The picture was vivid in his trained imagination.

Perhaps more than most types of business man the publisher, however shrewd, has none

the less his dramatic moments — his times for a generous gesture. Horace Besley had one now. ‘Please pardon me a moment,’ he said. ‘Do not stir, till I come back.’

Gwen remained, lost in a mounting swirl of joyous emotion, in which practical thoughts were beginning to dart about like goldfish in a cascade of sunlit waters.

When Besley reëntered the room he held in his hand the large folded blue strip of paper which is so authentically and thrillingly the royalty check of his firm. He handed it to Gwen with a flash of his dark eyes.

‘Permit me to advance this, with the compliments of the firm,’ he said. ‘It is not legally due until July, but it is a pleasure to Stropers to make this exception.’

Gwen took the check, her eyes on his, ‘Oh, thank you!’ she said.

‘You understand,’ said Besley, ‘there will be more due and payable July first?’

‘Yes, oh, yes,’ said Gwen, her startled gaze still on his.

Then her eyes dropped to the check in her hand.

‘Mr. Besley!’ she whispered, for her voice quite failed her.

Horace Besley got his full payment for the

gesture in that moment. Gwen's eyes and voice were all that incredible joy could make them. He smiled down at her.

'I cannot tell you how glad I am for your success,' he said, 'and that we may have the pleasure of this irregularity. And if you would like to slip away quietly, there is a door to the stairs.'

'Oh, yes, yes!' said Gwen. Then with tears in her voice, 'How can we ever thank you?'

'Write us another book when your Dan gets well,' said Besley, seriously.

On that unbelievable remark Gwen found herself sympathetically ushered out by the private door to the hall by the stairs.

Down the stairs as if the treads were of air, and across the street to the Common, went Gwen, with Stopers' check for ten thousand dollars in her pocket!

The same sky, the same ground, the same lights and sounds on the Common as forty-five minutes ago. But nothing in Gwen's world was the same. Here was a great new world of promise, which had gained hope for despair, joy for bitter grief, opportunity for the closed door. Oh, let the philosopher talk of the nothingness of money! Money, too, has its great days, its time to be in the ranks of

the angels. And this was such a time. The ten-thousand-dollar check for Gwen and Dan (and *more to come*) meant just a bit of Heaven come down to earth, as Gwen's intelligent imagination interpreted it in terms of health-measures for Dan.

Already her mind was beginning to plan eagerly, actively, for what he needed; rest, care, beauty — quiet!

Then as she sped along down the mall, the swift crowding of her thoughts unconsciously hurrying her steps, this day of wonders brought another blessing. She met Mrs. Smith just crossing the mall on the uphill path.

‘Gwen! How delightful!’ said Mrs. Smith, hands out. ‘We got in only last night, and somehow my thoughts were on you this morning. How well you look, my dear!’

‘Oh, darling Mrs. Smith’ (Gwen's high tension dramatized her customary speech, but she was unaware of it), ‘I am so glad to see you!’ She turned and moved on with Mrs. Smith.

‘And I you, dear child,’ said Mrs. Smith, her eyes keen on Gwen's glorified face, ‘I have not even congratulated you yet on the success of the “Magic Flute.” It must be

doing quite marvelously well, judging from what one hears of it.'

Gwen began to laugh, rather hysterically.

'Do people talk about it?' she said.

'How can you ask! It is positively becoming the fad,' said Mrs. Smith. 'I have started to write you our congratulations more than once, but we have been fearfully busy, and I knew I should see you soon.'

'What a fool I have been,' said Gwen. 'What an idiot! Everybody else knowing about it, and I—I have thought it was a failure.'

It was Mary Smith's turn to be exclamatory now. 'A failure!' she said. 'How did you ever get such a notion?'

Gwen told her.

'For pity's sake,—Cottrell!' she murmured. 'That relic! My dear, my dear—if I had only been here.'

'Never mind,' said Gwen, squeezing her friend's arm. 'Nothing matters now. Mr. Besley has given me our first payment to-day, and I am on my way to Dan. He has never known a thing about the book. And the first thing he knows will be all this money!'

As she spoke, Gwen was suddenly aware of time, and the ordinary duties of the day.

Her lunch hour had vanished! She was absent from the office, and had telephoned no excuse. Consternation seized her.

But in another moment she had firmly seized consternation and put it aside. A reckless sense of power rose in her. This should be her hour, and Dan's. She would forthwith telephone and ask to be excused for the day. It could be done — and it should be done! Moreover, now that she had Mrs. Smith, she would use the opportunity to find out much she needed to know. No one could more surely help her to get and to do just the right things for Dan. Mrs. Smith knew what was what and who was who. And Gwen felt that she would enjoy the drama of the situation.

Mrs. Smith's warm congratulations and adequate delight over Gwen's last remark had accompanied these kaleidoscopic thoughts. But now she said, 'I have not had my lunch, Gwen, have you? I was delayed at my tailor's. Come over to the Club with me, and tell me really all about this while we eat. Or, if you have eaten, have an ice while I fill my starving soul.'

Gwen laughed again. She seemed always laughing or exclaiming, this strange day.

‘I haven’t had lunch, either,’ she said. ‘But I was so excited that I did not know it.’

‘Then come along,’ said Mrs. Smith. ‘They will serve us if we get in before two.’

At the Club Gwen did her telephoning, successfully, while Mrs. Smith ordered luncheon for both. Then the two settled down to talk across the small table, beginning with the glorious news of the ten-thousand-dollar check.

‘I don’t mind telling you,’ said Mrs. Smith, rather ruefully, ‘that in a lifetime of authorship, no publisher has ever given *me* ten thousand dollars at one time!’

‘It is just magic,’ said Gwen, between solemnity and whim. ‘We needed a magic so much that it came.’

‘Maybe,’ said Mrs. Smith with a tender little smile.

CHAPTER XX

THEN the talk began in earnest. Gwen had a feeling oddly combined of frantic haste and large leisure, underlying her interest in the telling and listening. Haste, because now that she had the means there was so infinitely much she wanted to do; leisure because she was free from the office, and not till after shop hours could she find Dan.

She told Mrs. Smith everything, and her friend was painfully moved by the recital of so much sorrow and trouble. 'Why, oh, why did you not write me?' she repeated.

'I could not beg, you know,' said Gwen wistfully. 'Though,' she added fiercely, 'I was about ready for that, this morning.'

Mrs. Smith pressed her hand wordlessly. But Gwen's mood could not linger with unhappiness in this hour of supreme expectation. Her mind was doing phantastic, impossible things beneath the surface of her words and acts; plans, swift, sure, glorious, were forming. She leaned forward and spoke with an impelling simplicity and directness.

'Dear Mrs. Smith, it seems to me you were

sent to me to-day; you know so many things, so many people, and I — I want to do so much, *so fast*.'

'What?' said Mrs. Smith, leaning in her turn.

'I must find a little home in the country,' said Gwen, thinking aloud, 'a sunny convenient little house with some ground around it. And I must get furniture — now, *at once*; — can you help me? Do you know any especially good region to look in? Think, oh, think!'

Mrs. Smith's eyes were bright under a slight frown of concentration. She followed Gwen's unspoken meaning with the words, seeing the plan whole: an immediate haven for Dan's recovery; no care for him, no questions, just escape and joyous surprise.

Her mind in turn took to swift, kaleidoscopic vision. It raced over people and possibilities. She knew so many people, heard of so many domestic changes.

Suddenly the concentration broke in a gleam of pure delight. 'Why of course!' she breathed. 'Of course! If only it hasn't sold!'

Gwen caught the rising excitement in her tone. She looked her question, unspeaking.

'There is — or was two weeks back, a won-

derful little house for sale and at a bargain, out Wallingford way,' said Mrs. Smith rapidly. 'It is the house Mary Boyden — you remember my friend, Mary Boyden? — gave Junior last May for his wedding present.'

Gwen's hands controlled themselves; her eyes widened.

'I haven't seen it, Gwen, but from what Mary told me I fancy it charming; she is very keen on Colonial things, you know, and she renovated this little old Colonial house — added sun porches and whatnot — and furnished it, in the period. The furniture would be very nice, that is sure, though probably nothing rare. Seems to me she said there were several acres of land and a barn — Junior had a notion he wanted to farm, on the side, so to speak. The young people moved in last May. But in November Marie decided she couldn't (or wouldn't) endure the New England winters. Her Dad, who owns quite a slice of the State of California, made a business opening for Junior, and by Christmas they were gone, bag and baggage, to California to live. Mrs. Boyden hoped they would at least spend their summers in the Wallingford house. But when I saw her at

the Fortnightly Club last, she said Junior had definitely asked her to put the place on the market for him.'

'Oh,' Gwen breathed. Then, 'Did she give you any idea of the price?'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Smith, 'very modest, for cash. Junior wants to invest the money in business. Mary says the house isn't in the *fashionable* country district (which I'm thinking affected Marie's decision) and that Junior will be content with something under nine thousand.'

'*Mrs. Smith,*' Gwen almost whispered, 'if only it isn't sold!' Then, 'Would it be possible, am I asking too much — will you call up Mrs. Boyden and introduce me over the line?'

All things fitted together like a miracle this day. Mrs. Boyden was disengaged; she was only too eager to further Junior's interests; the little house was not sold. And the issue was that at three o'clock Gwen was in the big Boyden car telling Mrs. Boyden swiftly but movingly enough of her story to bring out all that was motherly and friendly in her companion's nature, while the Boyden chauffeur whirled them swiftly and smoothly to Wallingford.

Before they reached the little house every arrangement was made, conditioned only by Gwen's approval of the house itself, and by Dan's later ratification: immediate possession and a check on account, with a lawyer's letter covering everything pending the passing of the deeds.

'You can move in to-morrow morning if you want to,' said Mrs. Boyden, smiling. 'I had it put in order last week, and there really would be very little to do. But you may not like the house ——'

But when Gwen saw the house, it seemed to her that the 'Morning Stars sang together' in her heart. It was *her* house, hers and Dan's! The house of their dreams, their needs. 'Dear God, I thank Thee, I thank Thee,' went the rhythm of her pulse.

And when she saw the little unspoiled Ford sedan, trussed up wistfully in the barn, Junior's despised near-new Ford, waiting to be 'thrown in' for a good purchaser, she broke into tremulous laughter which left her cheeks and lashes wet. 'Meant for us, brought to us, just in time,' her mind affirmed. 'The answer to prayer.'

Mother MacDonald turned from her tele-

phone with an odd sense of something big, something dramatically joyous, impending. Gwen's voice had merely said that she could not get home in time for supper and would eat a bit on the way, and she had something to tell Mother privately as soon as she got home. They must get a quiet chance before Dan came. 'No, not bad news; good, *good*, but absolutely secret just now.'

An electric something leaped straight from Gwen's heart to her mother's.

'What's happened, I wonder,' she thought, standing a moment with the instrument in her hand. 'It's something good for both of them, please God!'

Gwen ate no bite, did not even think of hunger again. But she reached home enough ahead of Dan's coming to achieve the confidence with her mother.

Mrs. MacDonald's steady temperament stood her in good stead during that 'quiet' conference. Not even to have known of the existence of a book, and then to have to grasp the fact of the book's incredible success, all in a swift series with plans for an immediate fairy-tale dénouement for the book's authors, was no mean test of her quality as confidante and confederate. But she was magnificently

equal to it. Crying for joy, eyes blazing through tears with pride of her Gwen, heart overflowing with tenderness for Dan, she caught Gwen's ideas and carried them on triumphantly with the assurance of her own splendid vitality.

'You can explain to Father after you go to bed, can't you, Mums?' said Gwen. 'He'll help us, anyway.'

'Will he, just!' said John's wife excitedly. 'The two of us will have everything apple pie in twenty-four hours, and no one the wiser till you give the word. Oh, praise the Lord for all his mercies, Gwenny, my lamb!'

'I do,' said Gwen, deep and soft.

CHAPTER XXI

THE haste of her bathing and dressing gave Gwen a flushed and tremulous beauty to Dan's eyes when he arrived.

'Come out in the kitchen, will you, Dan?' she said to him. 'I promised to make candy for the children, and besides, I am awfully tired to-night, and it will be quiet there.'

Dan was glad to be in the room farthest from the penetrating sounds of youthful repartee. The MacDonald kitchen was a blessed spot; clean as only Annie MacDonald could make a workroom, but extraordinarily bright and comfortable; from the pot of geraniums on the sill to the checked gingham cushion on the rocker, it shone with kindness and cheer. Gwen set out the candy ingredients on the table. It seemed a comparatively good night with Dan. His somber eyes held a semblance of interest, and Gwen noted the slight quirk at the corners of his mouth that was now his lightest-hearted expression.

Her own heart was throbbing like a drum, and her head felt light.

'Do you mind if I make coffee, Dan?' she

said, and giving him no time to respond, she chattered on, getting out the coffee and coffee pot busily, 'I was so tired when I came home that I could not eat, and now I am starved.'

The cynical smile she dreaded did not appear on Dan's lips. Her manner had been unusually convincing, she thought. She breathed more freely, and set out cream and sugar and cups. The aroma of the fresh coffee rose invitingly.

Dan lifted the pot from the stove and set it on its blue tile. He seated Gwen and drew his own chair close; accepted sandwich and steaming cup in something like the natural manner of the good old days.

Gwen could not know that he had made up his mind during the night, to 'go out decently, not like a sick cat.' He had determined to take such casual sweetness as might offer, with a good grace, and when it became impossible longer to carry any grace at all — to assist the process of departure. That he was no longer quite sane is probably an exaggerated statement. And that he would have carried out his programme had events not changed his course, is not entirely sure. But the fact now was that in his own sick mind, regarding himself as a very brief sojourner in the world

of men, he soberly meant to make as little fuss as his wretched physique would let him, during his stay. Gwen did not know this, but she was aware of a lessening tension.

Dan ate and drank and served Gwen with the little courtesies she loved in him. The good food and delicious coffee sent a feeble glow through his veins, presently, and gave his pallid face a healthier hue. But the remoteness of his attitude was rather intensified than lessened by his effort to share in the playful present.

After they had eaten, Gwen started the candy for the youngsters. She gave Dan the quiet task of cracking nuts. His eyes followed her adroit, uncalculated motions. She made a charming domestic picture in her little blue gown and picturesque apron, her head of fair curls shining like a nimbus around her unusually flushed face. Now and again she turned to throw a smile and a word to him.

The smile was nervous, but it looked to him only a bit timid, vaguely imploring. Dan thought, somberly, that she was the prettiest thing God ever made. Not for him, now. Not for him. Even his apathy writhed at that thought. And presently, as his eyes dreamed over her, he countered with the rather grim

mental assertion, 'Mine while I live, anyway.'

'What are you looking so fierce about, Danny?' said Gwen, coming suddenly over to the table where he was cracking nuts without looking at them. 'What are you thinking about?'

Dan dropped the nut-cracker, and pulled her onto his knee. It was an uncharacteristic motion; Dan was a deferential lover. And it was an uncharacteristic position for Gwen. But she made no resistance to his embrace, showed no hint of being startled, when he took her chin in one wasted hand and his eyes burned into hers.

'I was thinking,' he said low and intensely, 'that I would barter my soul to see you moving about like this, in our own home, married to me. That would be something worth dying for!'

'Do you really love me so much?' asked Gwen, wistfully.

Dan's eyes devoured her, something in their depths that even she could not read.

'Never doubt that I loved you,' he said painfully. 'Never think I did not know you for the sweetest thing in God's world. I am no good for you, now, beloved, but no one

— no one — will ever love you as I love you.'

He buried his face in her breast, and Gwen felt the struggling of his breaths. She seized her time.

'Beloved,' she said, her hands on his hair, 'no one else will love me as you do, for no one else will get the chance. You are going to get well and marry me, Dannie.'

Dan made a little protesting sound, a 'don't probe that wound' sound. But Gwen went on: 'Dearest, I can't think any sad thoughts, I am so happy to-night; something has happened that is going to give you and me a holiday, the nicest holiday we ever had in our lives. Look up and get ready to smile, Dan, while I tell you.'

Surprised, Dan raised his head, and with a little consoling pressure of his hands Gwen drew herself slowly away from him. Her eyes held him, appeal in their depths, a child's delight in their shining surface.

'Sweetheart,' she said, 'if you had your choice, your absolute choice, where would you most like to spend this long week-end holiday — the Saturday afternoon, Sunday, and Monday?' She waited, trembling, her seeking eyes on his.

Dan made a weary grimace. 'I expect to

spend Saturday afternoon, Sunday and
— — ,

‘No,’ Gwen stopped him with a rebuking finger, ‘I didn’t say where do you *expect* to spend the holiday, I said, “Where would you *choose* to spend it, if you could choose?” It’s a game, Dannie; you have one guess!’

Dan smiled slowly, conquered by the sweetness of her.

‘I would spend it where I would spend every day of my life, if I had the choice,’ he said, his eyes yearning into hers, ‘in the country, with you. In the fields, on the hills, in some little quiet house where there was sunshine — — and peace — and you — —’

‘The right answer,’ Gwen said, a choke in her gay voice. ‘That is exactly how we are going to spend the holiday, Dan! You, and I, and Mother! Now listen to the nicest plan you ever heard. Out in the country, near Wallingford, is a ducky little house on a hill, that nobody lives in just now. It is owned by a friend of Mrs. Smith’s, my Mrs. Smith, you know. The other day I — well, I had a chance to do something for this lady who owns it, that she seemed to think was valuable — — and, Dan, she has given me the use of that little house, absolutely, for this week-

end! No strings to it. The house is *ours* for the week-end, and so is the little car she had stored in the barn!’

Then, hastily, before he could voice his surprise or questions, ‘Oh, Dan, I am so tired this spring! I am just crazy to get out where it is quiet and sweet. I can’t imagine anything more wonderful than three days of driving in country lanes with you, or fooling round a garden! And Mother is just as eager. She has not had a vacation for years. She says she thinks it would be heavenly for just us three to go out there together for Saturday afternoon and Sunday, and loaf. Dad could come over Monday and come home with us. Won’t it be wonderful, Dan?’

Wise Gwen! The quick shift to her own weariness, her mother’s eagerness, was effective. Dan forgot his fear of being helped, his bitterness, forgot everything but incredulous joy that such a good thing could come to his darling.

‘Gwen,’ he said, huskily, ‘it sounds too good to be true. Are you *sure* she meant it?’

‘Sure, Honey; she took me out there with her own big car this very day and showed me the house. See, I have the key!’

‘But, but,’ said Dan, mounting rapture

struggling with disbelief in so great a stroke of luck, 'would she like, do you think, for you to bring a stranger? Maybe I shouldn't go?'

'She knows you are coming,' Gwen said, through nervous laughter. 'The house is *absolutely ours*, to do as we please with — — for as long as we shall be staying.'

'Oh, Gwen; oh, Gwen!' breathed Dan, and suddenly he turned away from her and put his head down on his arm. His body shook with an uncontrollable sob. But the next minute he raised his head and smiled at her with a quivering mouth that looked like the boy's mouth Gwen knew before the war. 'Three days in the country, with you!'

The tears forced themselves to Gwen's eyes; happy tears. But she would have none of them.

'Mother is going to pack a food hamper,' she said, keeping the gay note. 'The young Dimick boy is going to drive her out in the morning, with an order of groceries; he goes out that way.' (Her mind danced impishly over the thought of the other things Mother planned to pack, and the earlier trips she planned to make.) 'We can drive out in the

flivver about two; you and I. You can get here by then, can't you?"

"*Can I?*" said Dan, unsteadily, "watch me! I'll pack my bag Friday night and take it to the shop."

"I shall pack mine, too," said Gwen, demurely. "My! how I shall loaf! — — don't let's do much *but* loaf, Dan?"

"Suits me," said Dan, raising her hand to his cheek. "If you will sit beside me, I will guarantee to do a perfect imitation of the old lady who said that "sometimes she set 'n' thought, but mostly she jus' set." "

How good it was to hear Dan joke! How like himself! Gwen rejoiced, and rejoicing planned yet more daringly for the outcome of the magic holiday.

Dan had never seen her with such a light of secret happiness in her blue eyes, such dimples in her unduly thin cheeks. She bewitched him. He forgot his aching body and mocking nerves; forgot the blackness of his impending fate, and gave himself up to the bliss of sharing anticipation with his girl. It was almost like his dreams of a honeymoon — Gwen and the country — —

CHAPTER XXII

FOLLOWING Gwen's rather breathless directions, on the Saturday afternoon, at two, the driver of the spotless little car piloted it for an hour along the motor way toward Wallingford, then sharply to the right, and again to the left, down a long country road. Here a colony of cheerful modern houses lined the way, modestly inviting in white paint and green or red roofs. The car rolled along past this group and through a brief interval of real country fields. At the right, on the crest of a gentle hill, slightly back from the road, a picturesque low house gleamed out, as white and fresh as those they had passed, but with an indubitable authenticity about its Colonial lines that modestly bespoke the old.

Dan's eyes, dream-filled now, ran lightly over the trim hedge, the gracious elms, the fascinating lines of casement windows and harmoniously new verandas. His voice, which had steadily dropped and deepened ever since they left Gwen's home, made the ordinary words a caress, 'Dandy little farm, what?'

Gwen's face blushed again where the color was already high rose. Her eyes were fixed on Dan's hands, lean and nervous, on the wheel.

'That is it! That is our house, — — where we are going to stay, Dan,' she said, in a voice as low as his own.

'Oh, I say!' said Dan, amazed. Then, with a swift, exultant, possessive glance at the house, 'Oh, I say!' he repeated very low, dropping his face to hers.

Gwen's heart leaped. 'Turn in, Dan,' she said, lightly, but with a catch in her voice. 'It is all ours as long as we stay.' Then, as they swept up the drive, 'Let's leave our bags on the steps and drive her right into the barn. Mother is probably in the kitchen; she would be.'

Smiling uncertainly, Dan brought the sedan up to the trim steps, wreathed in rose vines breaking into tender leafage.

Wisely, Gwen made no effort to help take out the suitcases he manipulated with his well arm.

They put up the Ford in the cozy barn, lingering in the bright, hay-scented place to hold hands. And self-consciously, a bit afraid of their own hearts, they praised the barn,

the grounds, as they walked round the drive to the waiting bags at the door. As they came, Dan's eyes ran appreciatively, yearningly, over the gracious lines of the little house: its roof-slant, its cornice, the well-designed front porch.

'I never saw such a cute little house, Gwen,' he said. 'Don't you wish — —' his eyes finished the sentence.

'You like it, then?' said Gwen, glancing up, and down again.

'I could eat it,' said Dan convincingly. 'There's your mother, Gwen. Doesn't she just finish the picture? Hullo, Mother MacDonald!'

Smiling, framed in the open front door, Mrs. MacDonald did just finish the picture; it was home, instantly.

Dan threw his arm about her with a boyish fervor long absent from his habit. She kissed him, and then Gwen. Dan brought in the bags.

'I've something on the fire,' said Mrs. MacDonald, as she disappeared toward the back of the house. 'You'll both take a bite, I'm sure.'

The door shut, the two young things stood alone in a creamy white space, panelled and

besetled, ineffably gentle in atmosphere. At the left an open door glimpsed a low-ceiled, inviting room whose small-paned windows were twinkling in the afternoon sun.

Dan had a momentary impression of soft-hued brightness, of a comfort at once enhanced and, as it were, hidden by beauty.

Gwen passed through the door, a hand stretched backward to lead him in, as he dropped both bags to the floor.

Flushed, very wide-eyed, with an almost frightened excitement showing in her glance, she chattered, hurriedly.

‘There’s a fire-place, Dan. Mother, you see, has dusted everything. The fire is laid; shall we touch a match to it? Isn’t it a pretty room? I love it, don’t you?’

Dan halted her, looked at her. He had never seen her like this. Gwen was always competent, always poised. That she should be excited, timid, perhaps, touched him with a swift protecting tenderness. As she gestured about the room with her free hand, he led her gently by the one he held, to a deep-seated sofa that stood invitingly before the fireplace. Seating her there, he carefully lifted the cloak from her shoulders. Then he laid his own coat and hat on a chair.

The long, lovely room with its many windows, its cushions and polished tables, the loveliest room Dan had ever seen, smiled at them, caressingly. Its sweetness went straight to Dan's heart, and left something warm and melting and comforting there. He knelt before the fireplace, and struck a match. Gwen took off her hat and laid it on the table behind the sofa. Her hands were trembling.

'Say you like it, Dan, please,' her voice broke in a sweetness that pierced him.

The flames flickered and climbed, touching and glancing. On his knees Dan turned and faced her. '*Like it,*' he said, in a hushed tone, 'Like what?'

Gwen flushed again, 'The house, dear, — and — — the arrangement,' she said. 'You know, I feel just a little overbearing to have — to have — got this place, and brought you here, without showing it to you. Oh, *do you like it, Dan?* Is it really all right?'

'*Is it all right!*' Dan's glowing haggard eyes left hers for a second to sweep the room in a shining glance. His mouth quivered, 'Do you think Heaven would seem all right to a chap just out of hell?' he said in a low vibrant tone. 'It would be Heaven to be with you anywhere, Gwen, all to myself like this.'

You know that. But to be *here*, with you, like this, oh, Gwen!

His voice broke and sank to a murmur. His arms strained round her yielding young body, and she drew his head onto her breast. Over that beloved head her eyes, tear-filled, yet radiant, looked into the flames; her lips moved in silent words: 'God, I thank Thee. Please let it be always all right.'

Mrs. MacDonald's cheery call from the kitchen broke the spell, momentarily, but when Dan saw the pine-panelled dining-room, papered with a merry landscape of rivers and boats, and when from that delicious little room he came into a still more delectable kitchen, where mouth-watering smells added their "come hither" to glint of color and gleam of porcelain, he succumbed even more deeply to the charm of the adventure. He wandered about the room examining every appliance, every prettiness, with open delight, while the two women, busying themselves with serving the savory food, exchanged eye-messages that said, 'Good: all right so far!'

'Chicken broth!' said Dan, gloatingly, as they sat down to the charming painted table in its sunny alcove, 'no one ever did make

chicken broth like you, Mother Mac. And as I live, potato omelette! I haven't seen a potato omelette since befo' de wah! This can't be true!'

Again Gwen's eyes met her mother's; oh, but it was good to hear the old merry voice; to see Dan eating, and smiling his quirky, tricky smile. She took heart of grace for the great culmination of her venture — — the glorious confession.

But the culminating step was not taken that day. The moments and hours were borne away by a swift rush of happy impulses. First Dan carried Gwen off to see if there were gardens: to poke and delve in them, when found, for crocus-tips, signs of future daffodils, and then for a probable asparagus bed — — which, too, they found, joyously.

The sharp chill of early spring evening was in the air when they came glowing in to eat Mother's hot supper, apologetic, but reassured by her laughter, and later to do the dishes together in the kitchen which seemed actually to caress them with its cozy presence.

Before the living-room fire, Mrs. MacDonald and Gwen in big chairs, Dan stretched at their feet on the rug, cushions under his head, the minutes were like golden motes in

the sun — dancing, gone. The three talked, happily, softly; there was something infinitely precious, endlessly soothing, in their triple companionship in the firelight. It was late when the mother among them reluctantly roused to the traditional duty of putting her household to bed.

Dan fell asleep instantly, in a bed so soft and smooth and ample that his first thought in getting into it had been that he would not mind lying awake all night just to feel it, and to sense the comfort of the quaint, small bedroom.

Gwen, in the twin bed beside her mother, in the ‘master’s bedroom’ really meant to lie awake to plan. But she, too, slept at once, and deeply.

CHAPTER XXIII

So also the next morning slipped away like a caressing finger running over a string of gleaming beads.

Late, very late awakening; a merry breakfast round the kitchen stove; Dan driving them to the village church in the good little sedan. On the way home, a sharp, hail-like shower slapping their glass windows and emphasizing the unfami'iar luxury of a closed car. Much laughter and pretence of pride. Sunday dinner, prepared and eaten with intimate delight. Then, as the shower settled into a steady cold rain, the lovely living-room once more with its inviting fire.

Behind Dan's back the eyes of the two women met and lingered, saying, 'Now is the time! Now is the time!' And Mrs. MacDonald said aloud comfortably —

'I am off for a nap; you will excuse me, dears?'

Dan went with her to the stairs, an affectionate arm about her.

As the opportunity loomed suddenly large, Gwen's nerves all at once played her false.

She was in a panic. How should she begin? What should she say? How could she explain?

She fled softly from the living-room to the kitchen, and aimlessly got herself a drink, forgetting to drink it. She opened the cupboard doors and shut them again, blindly; finally stole up the backstairs and stood, breathing fast, in the little shut-away chamber which had been planned for a maid. Minutes passed — — —

As suddenly as it came, the panic passed. She was Gwen again, trusting in her star. She powdered her nose, patted her hair, descended by the way she came, and entered the living-room casually.

At that point the casualness ceased. Dan was sitting by the fire, reading, and the book in his hands was — — yes, it *was*! How had he found it? What should she — —

Dan looked up, his eyes puzzled, excited, rather wild. ‘Gwen,’ he said, ‘this is the maddest thing, the most impossible thing, look here!’ He put out a hand to draw her down; tapped a page with his palm. ‘Look at *this*, Gwen! The chap that wrote this book — whoever he was — must have been in my regiment! He must have known Heinie and Jack.

There couldn't be two others like them. But that isn't the queerest; — Gwen, I could swear some of these places are exactly what *I wrote in my letters to you* — — Look!

Trembling, flushing, between smiles and tears, Gwen dropped on her knees at his knee, as if the better to see.

'Listen,' said Dan hoarsely, and read aloud one of his own best bits.

'*Doesn't* that sound like you, darling?' said Gwen innocently.

'It is me,' said Dan, incorrectly but convincingly. 'I remember writing it. Gwen, what can it mean? Do you suppose some one got hold of some of my letters and worked these things into his book? Two people couldn't, simply *couldn't* write exactly the same words — let's see what comes next.' But Gwen put her hand over his trembling hand.

'Have you looked in front to see who *did* write it?' she said, quietly.

Dan fluttered the leaves swiftly.

'D. M. and G. M.' he said, frowning. 'Doesn't tell much, does it? "D. M. and G. M." — Say, that's funny, too! They've got our initials, Gwen, do you see? "D. M. and G. M."!'

Gwen looked into his eyes and smiled.

‘That could be for Danforth Merriam and Gwendolyn MacDonald, couldn’t it?’ she said, slowly.

Dan looked back at her uncertainly. Her eyes poured light into his. Her smile sent a message tingling to his brain and heart.

‘What, what is it?’ he whispered.

‘It *does* stand for Danforth Merriam and Gwendolyn MacDonald,’ said Gwen, brokenly. ‘It does!’

Dan frowned, in a daze. ‘What do you mean?’ he said, vaguely.

‘I mean it is *your book*, Dan,’ Gwen said almost in a whisper. ‘It is made out of your letters to me. Oh, I was going to surprise you with it this afternoon, but you found it before I was ready. It is your book, dear, our book; I had to put in something more to tie the pieces together, so I signed my initials with yours, you see, not to make you responsible for anything you might not approve.’

Dan stared at her like one without sense. He thought she was indulging in an odd freak of humor.

Gwen said it over again, her breath coming fast.

‘This is your book, Dan. It is all made

out of your letters to me. I brought it out here on purpose to show it to you for the first time. It is really and truly our book, we made it.'

'My book? Our book? — — Honestly, Gwen?'

Dan's eyes and eyebrows were like the round orbs of a child. His mouth stretched in a wide delighted grin, incredulous, hopeful. 'Not really, Gwen?'

'Yes, really.'

'But, but, how did you get it printed, Gwen? It looks just like a regular book. I don't understand!'

Gwen laughed, nervously. 'You better believe it is a regular book,' she said. 'It is published by *Stropers*'; didn't you notice?'

The grin sobered unsteadily. Something almost solemn came into Dan's widened eyes, solemn, and doubtful, but touched with a ray from some far-off dawning of rapture. 'What did you say?' he stammered.

'Listen, Dan, darling,' Gwen said, slipping her hands into his, over the open book. 'I meant to tell you everything in order before you saw the book, but now I must tell you as best I can. Listen, dearest. When I used to read your wonderful letters I got to thinking what a splendid book the funny parts

would make. And I dreamed of giving you a wonderful surprise when you came home. And finally, Mrs. Smith encouraged me to go ahead and make a book for you. And she helped me find a publisher, and he liked it — you are going to meet him, Dan — he's fine — and this little book (she patted it) was published by Stropers' just before the Armistice.'

She put her hand swiftly to his lips. 'Yes, yes, I know! It seems mad of me not to have told you. But wait. You see, your mother and I — yes, Beloved, she knew, and she laughed and cried over your book; she was so proud of you! — — We dreamed that it would be a great success, and bring you fame and money.'

'Oh, say,' said Dan, hoarsely. 'Wasn't it wonderful enough to have it printed at all?'

'Well,' said Gwen, slowly, frowning, 'when your mother became so very ill — and the money ran low (never mind, hush, dearest, it is all right now) I went into Stropers' to see how things were going — if there was going to be a bit of money — and one of the firm told me the Armistice had killed all war books; he said they had practically abandoned "The Magic Flute."'

‘Oh, poor darling!’ murmured Dan. ‘My poor, brave darling.’

‘It was pretty bad!’ said Gwen, her lips tightening. ‘But what I am trying to explain, Dan, is that it was such a sickening disappointment that I *had* to forget it. I put the whole thing out of my mind like a nightmare that is too bad to remember. Even when you came home I didn’t think about the book; I couldn’t bear to. It had been, I thought, just a silly, childish blunder and no good to you or any one.’

‘Gwen, you darling,’ said Dan, his arms tightening about her comfortingly. ‘You don’t know what happiness you’ve given me. How it must have pleased Mother! And she never knew they chucked it? Oh, I am glad, I am glad. Gwen, it’s wonderful!’

He began to turn the leaves, absently; his attention wandered from Gwen. With growing amusement she saw him yielding to the delicious egotism of an author who handles his first book. He began to read — to interrupt himself with short chuckles, with exclamations; to praise her, and to ask eager questions.

For an hour every further confidence was put aside. The two authors were like children

over a Christmas stocking — and one of them knew of a whole Christmas tree of gifts, waiting for the stocking to be exhausted.

Gwen hugged the blessed sequel to her heart, not willing to disturb one of Dan's precious exaltations, even to add a climax thereto.

But presently Dan laid down his wonder-book and a puzzled frown grew in his eyes and on his forehead. 'Gwen,' he said, slowly, 'I suppose I am an awful fool — but honestly, you've made this a wonderful book — I, honestly — I should think people would *like* it!'

'Oh, Dan, Danny darling, they do!' cried Gwen, at last. 'They do! It is a success! It sells! The man who told me it was abandoned was an old chap who didn't know much; while I was trying to forget it, the book was going on getting popular! And I didn't know!'

'Oh, *Gwen!* Dan's hands seized hers. '*Gwen!*'

'Yes, Dan, and I never found out till this very week — the day I asked you to come out here for a holiday. *My* publisher, Mr. Besley, just home from Europe, met me on the Common and told me. It is a *success*, *Dan!* Do you know what that means? It is popular.'

Dan's face! Dan's clinging, caressing hands! 'You mean, you mean —' then, lamely, 'you mean, it's a regular book, after all?'

Gwen nodded, winking away tears.

'You smart little thing; oh, you smart little thing!' breathed Dan, 'you wonderful, darling thing!'

Then, as if a light had suddenly penetrated the confusion of his brain, he sat straight up, and took her face in his hands, eagerly, questioningly.

'Gwen,' he said, uncertainly, 'if the book is a success, won't there — won't there — be some money for us?'

Gwen nodded in his cupped hands, her eyes sparkling.

'Gwen!' The tone was hardly more than a breath, but it thrilled her every nerve. 'Oh, Gwen, maybe there will be enough so we can get married? Do you think? Darling, if only there would be a few hundred dollars? We could go and board somewhere cheap, way up in the country, till I got well enough to work. You wouldn't mind for a while, would you, dearest? I am sure I can get well if I can rest out of doors. These two days have given me a new heart, I want to live now — —

Would you do it with me, sweetness, if there's money enough — would you?

Again Gwen nodded, unable to speak.

His arms closed round her again, and he kissed her rapturously. Then, as suddenly, he held her away to see her face.

‘Beloved,’ he said, ‘I will do everything, anything now, to get well. I *will* get well, so help me God! And when I am well again I will earn you a home,’ his eyes left hers and traveled appraisingly, almost reverently, about the beautiful room; then humbly, like one taking a vow, he added, ‘a home like this.’

The girl could wait no longer. The great moment had come, the moment to tell the last of the secret. She stood and threw her arms around him in an abandonment of joy.

‘Darling Dear,’ she said. ‘You will get well, oh, you will! But you shall get well with me beside you, helping you. And, Darling Dear, you *have* earned me a home. This is our home, this house! It is ours, bought and paid for with the money from our book. Everything here is paid for! The garden is ours, the barn is ours, the little car is ours. Every piece of furniture, *everything* here is ours! The book paid for it.’

She was crying a little now at the look in his face. But she hurried on, putting a hand up to stop his stammering attempt at speech.

‘You shall have the garden to work in and the flowers you love. We will have a cow and chickens. I will take care of you, and when you are well, we will make more books together.’ Solemnly as one takes a vow, she added, ‘You shall never work in a factory again.’

She stopped. Dan was holding her face with hands that clung and shook. His face was wild and strained. Incredulous, but trembling with desire to believe, his voice came, hoarsely,

‘Are you mad, Gwen? What talk is this? This house ours? Child, this place would cost a small fortune. You want me to believe that a bit of a book — a book made out of letters —’ In turn he stopped; faith in the impossible flowed from the steady shining of her eyes. His hands loosened, his breath shortened and labored.

‘Gwen,’ he whispered, brokenly, imploringly, ‘Gwen, it — — it’s not *true*?’

The girl put her slim hands around the bony strength of his and drew them down. Her face lifted to him with an exalted sweet-

ness. She spoke calmly, now, with a steady, quieting reassurance.

‘It is all true, dearest,’ she said, slowly, clearly, ‘absolutely true. I paid nine thousand dollars for the house, furnished, and the land, everything as it stood, and I paid three hundred dollars for the little car. (The check was deposited with our lawyer, pending your signature; if you don’t approve, the agreement is cancelled.) There are seven hundred dollars left to our joint account in the bank now, and more than two thousand is due us July first. Mr. Besley says they have fifteen thousand dollars’ worth of advance orders on their books now, and he says by all the signs the book will run to three or four times that within the year.’

Dan’s lips opened and closed again. ‘Nine thousand, fifteen thous — —’ He swallowed nervously. He looked and looked at her. Conviction slowly crept into his resisting mind.

At last the absurd, impossible, miraculous trueness of it came to him. He gulped a sobbing breath, his muscles went weak, and he sank back into his chair. Slowly a comic boy’s grin spread over his haggard features.

‘Gosh,’ he said, simply. ‘Gosh!’

The reaction was good for Gwen. Laughter seized her. He looked such a delicious great youngster sitting there with his foolish grin. The tragic engraving of pain and despair was being wiped out by the powerful solvent of joy.

‘Oh, Dan,’ she said, ‘you don’t know how funny you can be. Your book is the funniest thing ever. Mrs. Smith says people laugh themselves sick over it.’

‘Gosh,’ said Dan again.

At this Gwen bade fair to have hysterics for the first time in her wholesome life. But she dashed the tears from her eyes and drew a hard breath. ‘Dan,’ she said shakily, ‘it is all perfect. We have a life income, and we can write more books, together — — and oh, my dear, isn’t this house just too ducky?’

Dan looked at her, smiled uncertainly and looked again. His eyes traveled incredulously, gloatingly, about the dainty appointments of the living-room. Their living-room! His gaze went to the window and lingered there on the undulating sweep of brown and green. Their garden! Yesterday he was a man without a job, a pauper, a broken thing. To-day he was the joint author of a popular book, a man with a home and a life income — a success!

And Gwendolyn had done this thing. His Gwenny, whom he loved with every fiber of his body and soul.

Slowly he rose and turned to her. He stretched his gaunt frame to its full height and raised his arms with a sighing breath that seemed to breathe out the last poison-gas atom of pain and despair. Then with a gesture as reverent as it was exultant he gathered his little co-author into the tender passion of his arms. With his cheek on her shining hair he began to tell her all the wonder and gratitude, the yearning and marvel of his love.

And listening to his words, her singing heart cuddled against his own, Gwen silently sent up her pæan of thanksgiving to the great Maker of Magic whose answers to prayer had set such harmonies fluting through the discordant accidents of their lives. To her, to Dan, and to Dan's beloved little mother the answers had come when least an answer seemed possible. To each the right way out had opened. With each all was well.

The room was very peaceful, quiet, save for Dan's murmur. The firelight glowed and danced. One mischievous flash lighted for an instant on a book that lay face downward on the floor. The fire-flash twinkled like an

appreciative smile over the letters which spelled the appropriate name of that little volume, then twinkled away again, leaving only one word faintly visible in the rosy glow:
. . . Magic.

THE END.

TOBEY'S FIRST CASE

By

Clara Louise Burnham

BECAUSE Tobey Vincent is an unusually pretty girl, she is not taken very seriously as a reporter by her masculine associates on the staff of the Evening Telegram. But when Douglas Adair, the wire magnate, is found murdered, and suspicion has fallen first upon one and then another of his family and servants, Tobey, who is assigned to the case by her newspaper, clears up the mystery by a combination of charm, persistence, and logical reasoning, and by her ingenuity brings a happy outcome for herself and those in whom she is interested.

In 'Tobey's First Case' Clara Louise Burnham has taken a new theme and handled it with all her accustomed charm. The result is a novel that will please all her old admirers and also any reader who enjoys a first-class mystery story.

